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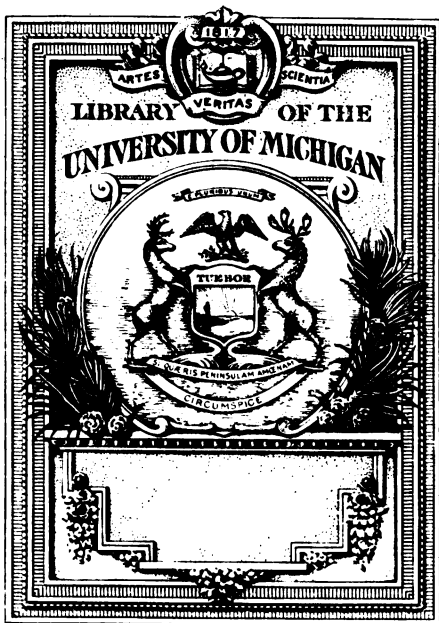
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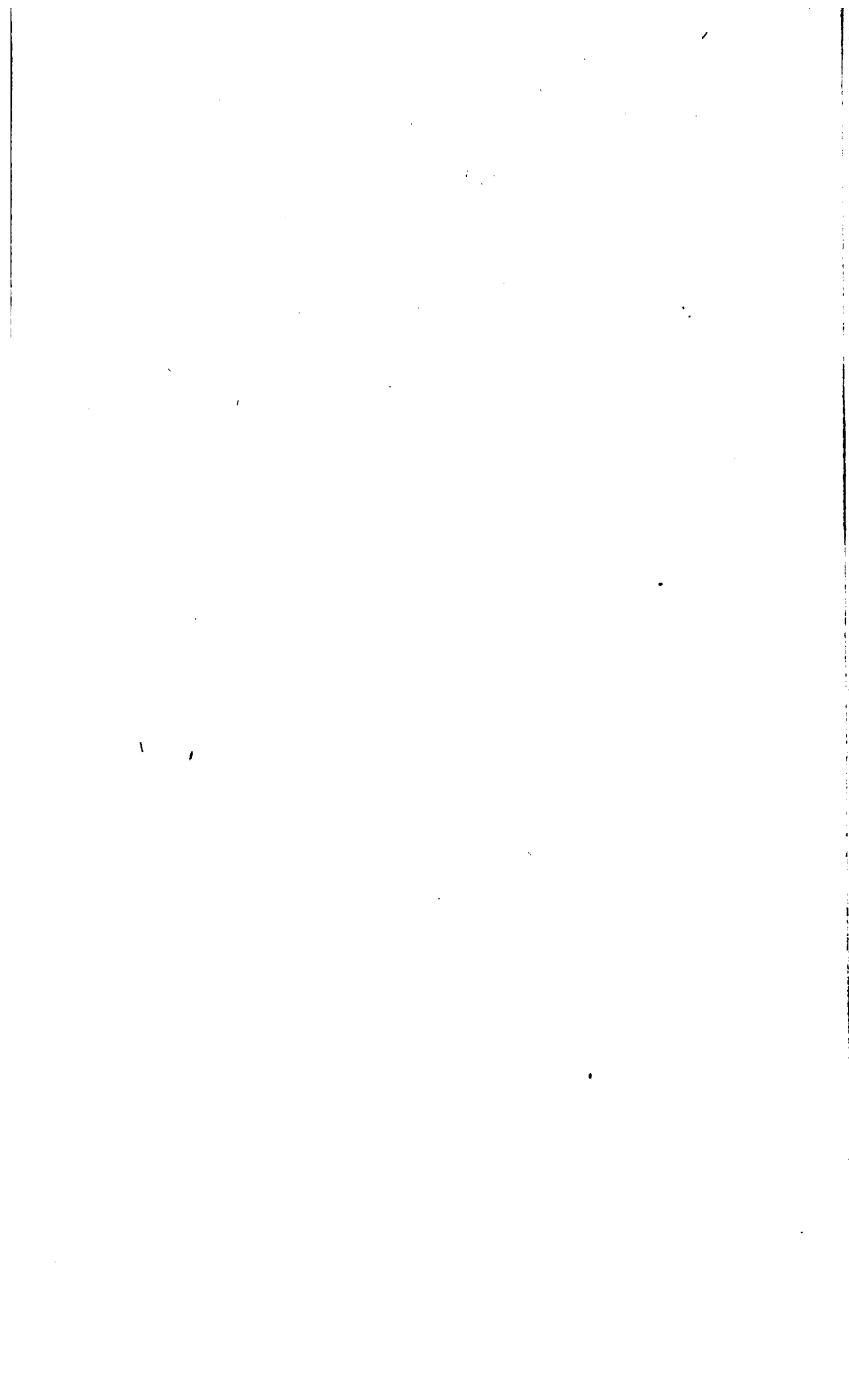
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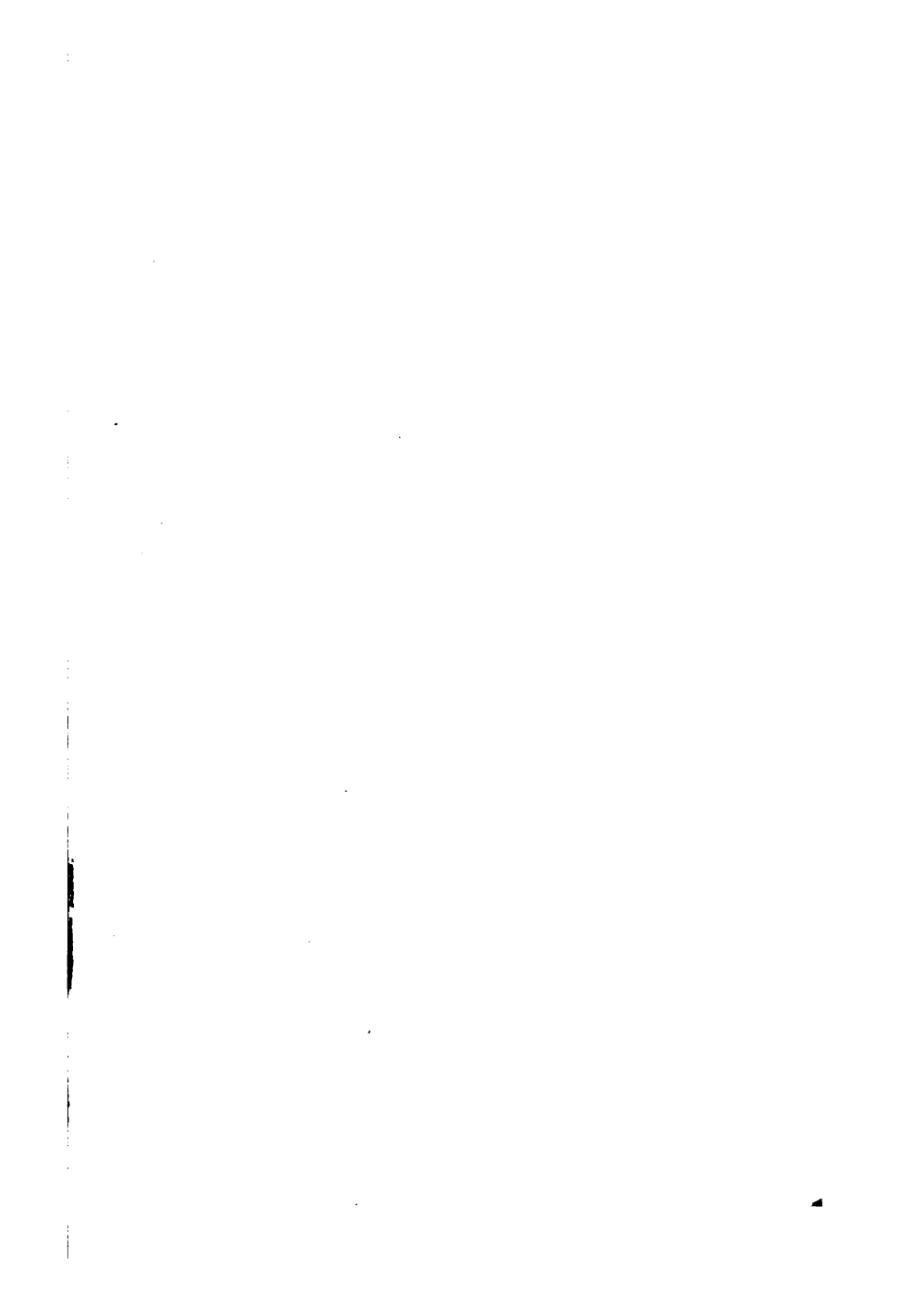
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THE BOOK OF ORM

"This also we humbly beg,—that Human things may not prejudice such as are Divine, neither that from the unlocking of the Gates of Sense, and the kindling of a greater Natural Light, anything of incredulity or intellectual night may arise in our minds towards DIVINE MYSTERIES."—STUDENT'S PRAYER, BACON.

—ἤδυν δε βιον μυστησι προφαίνε.—ORPHEUS.

THE BOOK OF ORM

35-345

BY
William
ROBERT BUCHANAN



London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1882

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* * Continued ill health compels the omission of two poems—"A Rune found in the Starlight," and "The Song of Heaven"—which, although written, cannot at present be rendered perfect for press. Section IX., too, is incomplete, wanting the all-important "Devil's Dirge," which, however, will be added in a future edition.—R. B.

INSCRIPTION.



To F. W. C.

FLOWERS pluckt upon a grave by moonlight, pale
And suffering, from the spiritual light
They grew in : these, with all the love and blessing
That prayers can gain of God, I send to thee !

If one of these poor flowers be worthy thee,
The sweetest Soul that I have known on earth,
The tenderest Soul that I can hope to know,
Hold that one flower, and kneel, and pray for me.

Pray for me, Comrade ! Close to thee I creep,
Touching thy raiment : thy good eyes are calm ;
But see ! the fitful fever in mine eyes—
Pray for me !—bid all good men pray for me !

If Love will serve, lo ! how I love my Friend—
If Reverence, lo ! how I reverence him—
If Faith be asked in something beautiful,
Lo ! what a splendour is my faith in him !

Now, as thou risest gently from thy knees,
Must we go different ways ?—thou followest
Thy path, I mine ;—but all go westering,
And all will meet among the Hills of God !

Thy ace sails with me on a darker path,
And smiles me onward ! For a time, farewell ;
Wear in thy breast a few of these poor flowers,
And let their scent remind my Friend of me !

Flowers of a grave,—yet deathless ! Be my love
For thee as deathless ! I am beckon'd on ;—
But meantime, these, with all the love and blessing
That prayers can gain of God, I give to thee !

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

Coruisk, 1870.

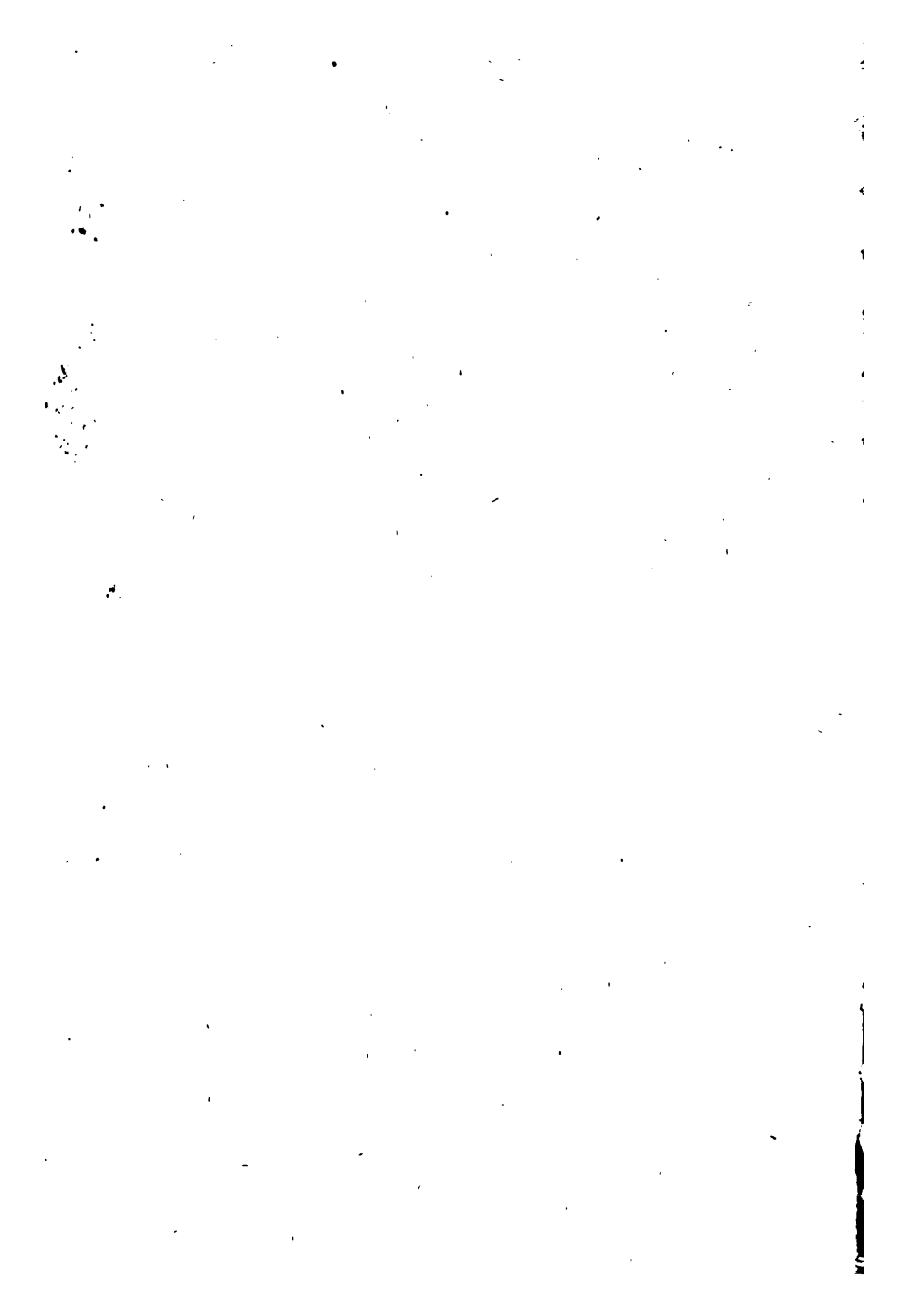
THE BOOK OF ORM.

I.

*Read these faint runes of Mystery,
O Celt, at home and o'er the sea;
The bond is loosed—the poor are free—
The world's great future rests with thee!*

2.

*Till the soil—bid cities rise—
Be strong, O Celt—be rich, be wise—
But still, with those divine grave eyes,
Respect the realm of Mysteries.*



THE BOOK OF THE VISIONS SEEN BY ORM
THE CELT.

THERE is a mortal, and his name is Orm,
Born in the evening of the world, and looking
Back from the sunset to the gates of morning.

And he is aged early, in a time
When all are aged early,—he was born
In twilight times, and in his soul is twilight.

O brother, hold me by the hand, and hearken,
For these things I shall phrase are thine and mine,
And all men's,—all are seeking for a sign.

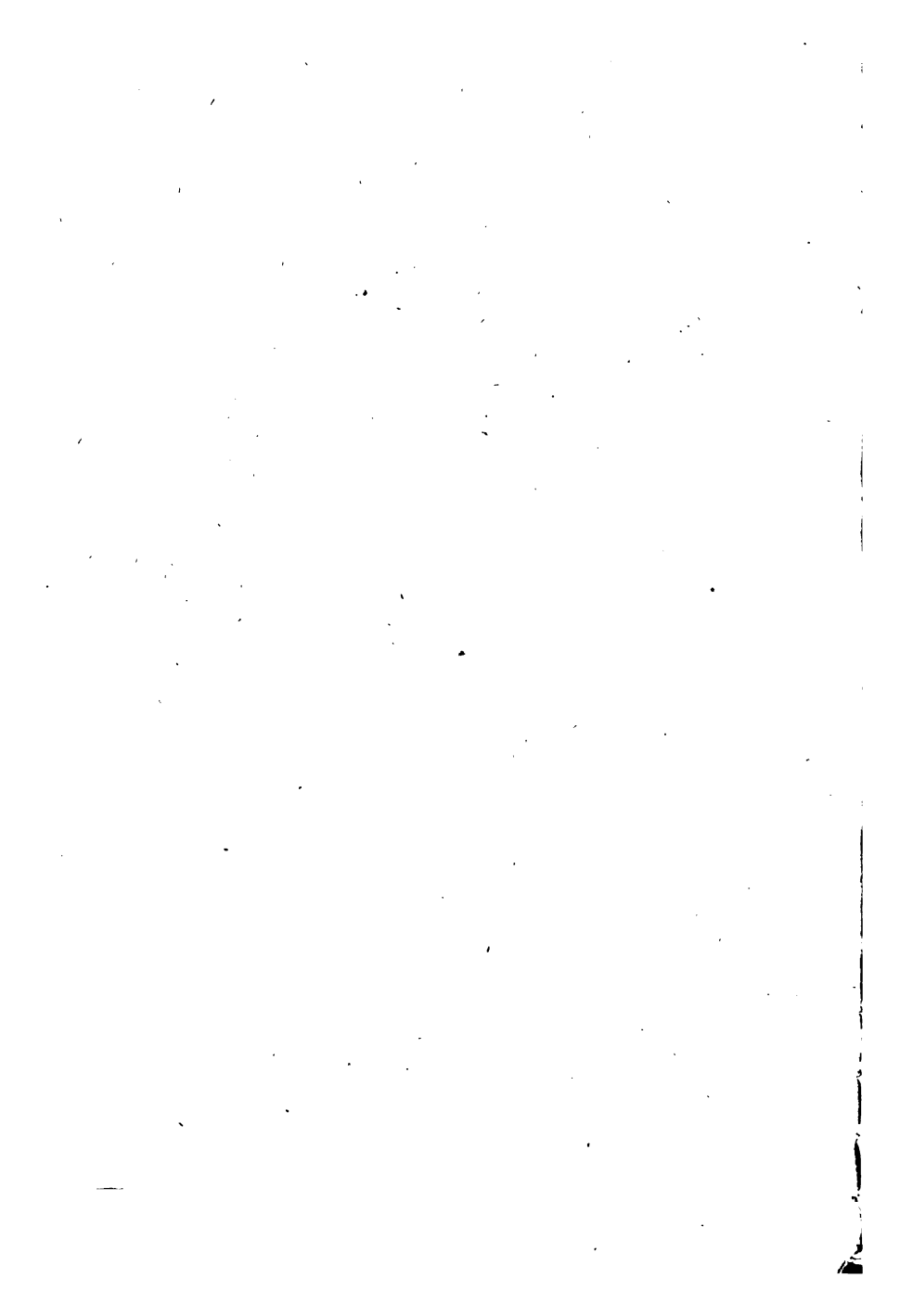
Thou wert born yesterday, but thou art old,
Weary to-day, to-morrow thou wilt sleep—
Take these for kisses on thy closing eyelids.



I.

FIRST SONG OF THE VEIL.

*How God in the beginning drew
Over his face the Veil of blue,
Wherefore no soul of mortal race
Hath ever look'd upon the Face ;
Children of earth whose spirits fail
Heark to the First Song of the Veil.*



I.

FIRST SONG OF THE VEIL.

I.

THE VEIL WOVEN.

IN the beginning,
Ere Man grew,
The Veil was woven
Bright and blue ;
Soft mists and vapours
Gather'd and mingled
Over the black world
Stretched below,
While winds of heaven
Blew from all places,
Shining luminous,
A starry snow.
Blindly, dumbly,

Darken'd under
Ocean and river,
Mountain and dale,
While over his features,
Wondrous, terrible,
The beautiful Master

Drew the Veil :
Then starry, luminous,
Rolled the Veil of azure
O'er the first dwellings
Of mortal race ;
—And since the beginning
No mortal vision,
Pure or sinning,
Hath seen the Face !

Yet mark me closely !
Strongly I swear,
Seen or seen not,
The Face is *there* :

When the Veil is clearest
And sunniest,
Closest and nearest
The Face is prest ;
But when, grown weary
With long downlooking,
The Face withdrawing
For a time is gone,
The great Veil darkens,
And ye see full clearly
Glittering numberless
The gems thereon.
For the lamp of his features
Divinely burning,
Shines, and suffuses
The Veil with light,
And the Face, drawn backward
With that deep sighing
Ye hear in the gloaming,
Leaves ye the Night.

Thus it befell to men
Graveward they journeyed,
From waking to sleeping,
In doubt and in fear,
Evermore hoping,
Evermore seeking,
Nevermore guessing

The Master so near :
Making strange idols,
Rearing fair Temples,
Crying, denying,
Questioning, dreaming,
Nevermore certain

Of God and his grace,—
Evermore craving
To look on a token,
To gaze on the Face.

Now an evangel,
Whom God loved deep,

Said, "See ! the mortals,

How they weep !

They grope in darkness,

They blunder onward

From race to race,

Were it not better,

Once and for ever,

To unveil the Face?"

God smiled.

He said—"Not yet !

Much is to remember,

Much to forget ;

Be thou of comfort !

How should the token

Silence their wail?"

And, with eyes tear-clouded,

He gazed thro' the luminous,

Star-inwrought, beautiful,

Folds of the Veil.

II.

EARTH THE MOTHER.

Beautiful, beautiful, she lay below,
The mighty Mother of humanity,
Turning her sightless eyeballs to the glow
Of light she could not see,
Feeling the happy warmth, and breathing slow
As if her thoughts were shining tranquilly.
Beautiful, beautiful the Mother lay,
Crown'd with silver spray,
The greenness gathering hushfully around
The peace of her great heart, while on her breast
The wayward Waters, with a weeping sound,
Were sobbing into rest.
For all day long her face shone merrily,
And at its smile the waves leapt mad and free :
But at the darkening of the Veil, she drew
The wild things to herself, and husht their cries—

Then, stiller, dumber, search'd the deepening
blue

With passionate blind eyes ;
And went the old life over in her thought,
Dreamily praying as her memory wrought
The dimly guessed at, never utter'd tale,
While, over her dreaming,
Deepen'd the luminous,
Star-inwrought, beautiful,
Folds of the wondrous Veil.

For more than any of her children of clay

The beautiful Mother knows—

She is so old !

Ye would go wild to hearken, if this day

Her dumb lips should uncloze,

And the tale be told :

Such unfathomable things,

Such mystic vanishings,

She knoweth about God—she is so old.

For oft, in the beginning, long ago,
Without a Veil looked down the Face ye know,
And Earth, an infant happy-eyed and bright,
Look'd smiling up, and gladden'd in its sight.
But later, when the Man-Flower from her womb
Burst into brightening bloom,
In her glad eyes a golden dust was blown
Out of the void, and she was blind as stone.

And since that day
She hath not seen, nor spoken,—lest her say
Should be a sorrow and fear to mortal race,
And doth not know the Lord hath hid away,
But turneth up blind orbs—to feel the Face.

III.

CHILDREN OF EARTH.

So dumbly, blindly,
So cheerly, sweetly,
The beautiful Mother
 Of mortals smiled ;
Her children marvell'd
And looked upon her—
Her patient features
 Were bright and mild ;
And on her eyeballs
 Night and day,
A sweet light glimmer'd
 From far away.
Her children gather'd
 With sobs and cries,
To see the sweetness
 Of sightless eyes ;

But tho' she held them

So dear, so dear,

She could not answer,

She could not hear.

She felt them flutter

Around her knee,

She felt their weeping,

Yet knew not wherefore—

She could not see.

“O Mother! Mother

Of mortal race!

Is there a Father?

Is there a Face?”

She felt their sorrow

Against her cheek,—

She could not hearken,

She could not speak;

With thin lips fluttering,

With blind eyes tearful,

And features pale,

She clasp'd her children,
And looked in silence
Upon the Veil.

Her hair grew silvern,
The swift days fled,
Her lap was heavy
With children dead ;
To her heart she held them,
But could not warm them—
The life within them
Was gone like dew.
Whiter, stiller,
The Mother grew.

The World grew hoary,
The World was weary,
The children cried at
The empty air :
“ Father of mortals ! ”

The children murmured,

“Father! father!

Art thou there?”

Then the Master answer’d

From the thunder-cloud :

“I am God the Maker!

I am God the Master!

I am God the Father!”

He cried aloud.

Further, the Master

Made sign on sign—

Footprints of his spirits,

Voices divine;

His breath was a water,

His cry was a wind.

But the people heard not,

The people saw not,—

Earth and her children

Were deaf and blind.

IV.

THE WISE MEN.

"Call the great philosophers !

Call them all hither,—

 The good, the wise !"

Their robes were snowy,

Their hearts were holy,

 They had cold still eyes.

To the mountain-summits

Wearily they wander'd,

Reaching the desolate

 Regions of snow,

Looming there lonely,

They search'd the Veil wonderful

With tubes fire-fashion'd

 In caverns below . . .

God withdrew backward,

And darker, dimmer,

Deepen'd the day :

O'er the philosophers

Looming there lonely

Night gather'd gray.

Then the wise men gazing

Saw the lights above them

Thicken and thicken,

And all went pale—

Ah ! the lamps numberless,

The mystical jewels of God,

The luminous, wonderful,

Beautiful Lights of the Veil !

Alas for the Wise Men !

The snows of the mountain

Drifted about them,

And the wind cried round them,

As the lights of wonder

Multiplied !

The breath of the mountain
Froze them into stillness,—
 They sighed and died.
Still in the desolate
 Heights overhead,
Stand their shapes frozen,
 Frozen and dead.
But a weary few,
 Weary and dull and cold,
Crept faintly down again,
 Looking very old ;
And when the people
Gather'd around them,
The heart went sickly
 At their dull blank stare—
“ O Wise Men answer !
Is there a Father ?
Is there a beautiful
 Face up there ? ”
The Wise Men answer'd and said :

“Bury us deep when dead—

We have travelled a weary road,

We have seen no more than ye.

’Twere better not to be—

There is no God !”

And the people, hearkening,

Saw the Veil above them,

And the darkness deepen’d,

And the lights gleamed pale.

Ah! the lamps numberless,

The mystical jewels of God,

The luminous, wonderful,

Beautiful lights of the Veil !

II.

THE MAN AND THE SHADOW.

*On the high path where few men fare,
Orm meeteth one with hoary hair,
And speaketh, solemn and afraid,
Of that which haunteth him—a Shade.
Slowly, with weary feet and weak,
They wander to a mountain peak;
And to the man with hoary hair
A Bridge of Spirits riseth fair,
Whereon his Soul with gentle moan
Passeth unto the Land Unknown.*

II.

THE MAN AND THE SHADOW.

I.

THE SHADOW.

O AGED MAN who, clad in pilgrim's garb,
With staff of thorn and wallet lying near,
Sittest among the weeds of the wayside,
Gazing with hollow eyeballs in a dream
On that which sleeps—a Shadow—at thy feet !
Hearest thou ?

By the fluttering of thy lips,
I know thou hearest ; yet, with downcast eyes,
Thou broodest moveless, letting yonder sun
Make thee a Dial, worn and venerable,
To show the passing hour. All things around

Share stillness with thee ; for behold they keep
The gloaming of the year. To russet brown
The heather fadeth ; on the treeless hills,
O'er rusted with the slow-decaying bracken,
The sheep crawl slow with damp and red-stain'd
wool ;

Keen cutting winds from the Cold Clime begin
To frost the edges of the cloud—the sun
Upriseth slow and silvern—many rainbows
People the desolate air with flowers that fade
Thro' pallor unto tears ; and tho' these flash
Ever around thee, here thou sittest alone,—
Best Dial of them all, old, moveless, dumb,
Ineffably serene with aged eyes,
Still as a stone,—yet with some secret spell
Pertaining to the human, some faint touch
Of mystery in that worn face, to show
Thy wither'd flesh is scented with a Soul.

Nay, then, with how serene and sad a light

Thy face, strange gleams of spiritual pain
Fading there, turneth up to mine ! Yea, smile !
Tender as sunlight on the autumn hills,
Cometh that kindly lustre ! Aye, thy hand—
Something mysterious streameth from thy palm—
Spirit greets spirit—scent is mixed with scent—
Sweet is the touch of hands. Behold me,—Orm,
Thy brother !

Brother, we are surely bound
On the same journey,—and our eyes alike
Turn up and onward : wherefore, now thou risest,
Lean upon me, and let us for a space
Pursue the path together. Ah, 'tis much,
In this so weary pilgrimage, to meet
A royal face like thine—to touch the hand
Of such a soul-fellow—to feel the want,
The upward-crying hunger, the desire,
The common hope and pathos, justified
By knowledge and gray hairs. Come on ! come on !

Up yonder ! Slowly, leaning on my strength,
And I will surely pick my steps with thine,—
While at our backs the secret Shadows creep,
And imitate our motions with no sound.

Dost thou remember more than I? *My Soul*
Remembereth no beginning.

One still day,
I saw the hills around me, and beheld
The hills had shadows,—for beyond their rim
The fiery sun was setting ;—then I saw
My ghost upon the ground, and as I ran
Eastward, the melancholy semblance ran
Before my footsteps ; and I felt afraid.

Could I have shaken off this grievous thing,
Much had been spared me. Since that day I ran,
And saw it run before me in the sun,
It hath been with me in the day and night,

The sunlight and the starlight—at the board
Hath joined me, darkening the festal cup—
Hath risen black against the whitening wall
On lonely midnights, when by the wind's shriek
Startled from terrible visions seen in dream,
Rising upon my couch, and with quick breath
Lighting the lamp, I hearkened—it hath track'd
My footsteps into pastoral churchyards,
And suddenly, when I was very calm,
Look'd darkly up out of the gentle graves,
So that I clench'd my teeth, or should have scream'd;
And still behind me—see!—it creeps and creeps,
Dim in the dimness of the autumn day.

Higher! yet higher! Tho' the path is steep,
And all around the withering bracken rusts,
Up yonder on the crag a mossy spring,
Frosted with silver, glistens, and around
Grasses as green as hedgerows in the May
Cushion the lichen'd stones.

Here let us pause :

Here, where the grass gleams emerald, and the spring
Upbubbling faintly seemeth as a sound,
A drowsy hum, heard in the mind itself—
Here, in this stillness, let us pause and mark
The many-colour'd picture. Far beneath
Sleepeth the glassy Ocean like a sheet
Of liquid mother-o'-pearl, and on its rim
A ship sleeps, and the shadow of the ship ;
Astern the reef juts darkly, edged with foam,
Thro' the smooth brine : oh, hark ! how loudly sings
A wild, weird ditty to a watery tune,
The fisher among his nets upon the shore ;
And yonder, far away, his shouting bairns
Are running, dwarf'd by distance small as mice,
Along the yellow sands. Behind us, see
The immeasurable mountains, rising silent
Against the fields of dreamy blue, wherein
The rayless crescent of the mid-day moon
Lies like a reaper's sickle ; and before us

The immeasurable mountains, rising silent
From bourne to bourne, from knolls of thyme and
 heather
To leafless slopes of granite, from the slopes
Of granite to the dim and ashen heights
Where, with a silver glimmer, silently
Pausing, the white cloud sheds miraculous snow
On the heights untravell'd,—whither we are bound.

O perishable brother, what a world !
How wondrous and how fair ! Look ! look ! and think !
What magic mixed the tints of yonder west,
Wherein, upon a cushion soft as moss,
A heaven pink-tinted like a maiden's flesh,
The dim star of the ocean lieth cool
In palpitating silver, while beneath
Her image, putting luminous feelers forth,
Bathes liquid, like a living thing o' the sea.
What magic ? What magician ? O my brother,
What strange Magician, mixing up those tints,

Pouring the water down, and sending forth
The crystal air like breath, snowing the heavens
With luminous jewels of the day and night,
Look'd down and saw thee lie a lifeless clod,
And lifted thee, and moulded thee to shape,
Colour'd thee with the sunlight till thy blood
Ran ruby, poured the chemic tints o' the air
Thro' eyes that kindled into azure, stole
The flesh-tints of the lily and the rose
To make thee wondrous fair unto thyself,
Knitted thy limbs with ruby bands, and blew
Into thy hollow heart until it stirred,—
Then to the inner chamber of his heaven
Withdrawing, left in midst of such a world
The living apparition of a Man,—
A mystery amid the mysteries,—
A lonely semblance, with a wild appeal
To which no form that lives, however dear,
Hath given a tearless answer,—a Shape, a Soul,
Projecting ever as it ageth on
A Shade which is a silence and a sleep.

Yet not companionless, within this waste
Of splendour, dwellest thou—here by thy side
I linger, girdled for the road like thee,
With pilgrim's staff and scrip, and thro' the vales
Below, a storm of people like to thee
Drifts with thee westward darkly, cloud on cloud,
Uttering a common moan, and to our eyes
Casting one common shadow; yet each soul
Therein now seeketh, with a want like thine,
→ The inevitable bourne. Nor those alone,
Thy perishable brethren, share thy want,
And wander haunted thro' the world; but beasts,
With that dumb hunger in their eyes, project
Their darkness—by the yeanling lambkin's side
Its shade plays, and the basking lizard hath
Its image on the flat stone in the sun,—
And these, the greater and the less, like thee
Shall perish in their season: in the mere
The slender water-lily sees her shape,
And sheddeth softly on the summer air

Her last chill breathing, and the forest tree
That, standing glorious for a hundred years,
Lengthens its shadow daily from the sun,
Fulfilleth its own prophecy at last,
And falleth, falleth. Art thou comforted?
Nay, then,—behold the shadows of the Hills,
Attesting these are perishable too,
And cry no more thou art companionless.

How, like a melancholy bell, thy voice
Echoes the word! “Companionless!” Thine eyes
Suffer with light and tears, and wearily
Thou searchest all the picture beautiful
For vanished faces. Still, “companionless!”
O brother, let me hold thy hand again—
Spirit greets spirit—scent is mixed with scent—
Sweet is the touch of hands. Look on me! Orm!
Thy brother!

And no nearer? O ’tis sad
That here, like dumb beasts, yearning with blank eyes,

Wringing each other's hands, pale, passionate,
Full of immortal likeness, wild with thirst
To mingle, yet we here must stand asunder,
Two human shapes, two mansions built apart,
Two pale men,—and two ghosts upon the ground !

Tread back my footsteps with me in thy mind :
I have wander'd long and far, and O I have seen
Strange visions ; for my soul resembles not
The miserable souls of common men—
Mere lamps to guide the body to the board
And lustful bed—say, rather, 'tis a Wind
Prison'd in flesh, and shrieking to be free
To blow on the high places of the Lord !
Hither and hither hath its pent-up struggle
Compelled my footsteps—o'er the snowy steeps,
Thro' the green valleys—into huts of hinds
And palaces of princes. It hath raved
Loud as the wind among the pines for rest,
Answered by all the winds of all the world

Gather'd like howling wolves beneath the moon ;
And it hath lain still as the air that broods
On meres Coruisken on dead days of frost,
In supreme moments of unearthly bliss
Feeling the pathos and exceeding peace
Of thoughts as delicate and far removed
As starlight. But in stormy times and calm,
In pain or pleasure, came the Shadow too,
Meeting the Soul in its superbest hour,
And making it afraid.

These twain have dwelt
Together, haunting one another's bliss,—
The Wind, that would be on the extremest peaks,
And the strange Shadow of the prison-house
Wherein 'tis pent so very cunningly.
Nay, how they mock each other ! "Shade accursed,"
The Wind moans, "yet a little while, and thou
Shalt perish with the poor and mean abode
That casts thee—follow and admonish *that*,—

To *me* thine admonition promiseth
The crumbling of the ruin chain'd wherein
I cry for perfect freedom." Then methinks
The wild Shade waves its arms grotesque and says
In dumb show, "Peace, thou unsubstantial Wind!
Bred of the peevish humour of the flesh,
Born in the body and the cells o' the brain;
With these things shalt thou perish,—foul as gas
Thou senseless shalt dissolve upon the air,
And none shall know that thou hast ever been."
Thus have they mock'd each other morn and
mirk

In speech not human. When I lay at night,
Drunk with the ichor of the form I clasp'd,
How hath the sad Soul, mocking the brute bliss,
The radiant glistening play o' the sense, withdrawn
Unto the innermost chamber of the brain,
And moan'd in shame; while in the taper light,
The Shades, with clasping arms and waving hair,
Seem'd saying, "Gather roses while thou mayst,

O royal purple Body doom'd to die !
And hush, O Wind, for *thou* shalt perish too !”

I saw a hind at sunrise—dumb he stood,
And saw the Dawn press with her rosy feet
The dewy sweetness from the fields of hay,
Felt the world brighten—leaves and flowers and grass
Grow luminous—yet beside the pool he stood,
Wherein, in the gray vapour of the marsh,
His mottled oxen stood with large blank eyes
And steaming nostrils : and his eyes like theirs
Were empty, and he humm'd a surly song
Out of a hollow heart akin to beast's :
Yea, sun nor star had little joy for him,
Nor tree nor flower,—to him the world was all
Mere matter for a ploughshare. On the hill
Above him, with loose jerkin backward blown
By 'winds of morning, and his white brow bare
Like marble, stood a singer—one of those
Who write in heart's-blood what is blotted out

With ox-gall ; and his soul was in his eyes
To see the coming of the beautiful Day,
His lips hung heavy with beauty, and he looked
Down on the surly clod among the kine,
And sent his Soul unto him thro' his eyes,
Transfiguring him with beauty and with praise
Into the common pathos. Of such stuffs
Is mankind shapen, both, like thee and me,
Wear westward, to the melancholy realm
Where all the gather'd shades of all the world
Lie as a cloud around the feet of God.

This darkens all my seeking. O my friend!
If the whole world had royal eyes like thine,
I were much holpen ; but to look upon
Eyes like the ox-herd's, blank as very beast's,
Shoots sorrow to the very roots of life.
Aye ! there were hope indeed if each man seemed
A spirit's habitation,—but the world
Is curst with these blank faces, still as stone,

And darkening inward. Have these dumb things Souls?
If they be tenantless, dare thou and I
Christen by so sublime a name the Wind
Bred in the wasting body?

Yestermorn,

In yonder city that afar away
Staineth the peaceful blue with its foul breath,
I passed into a dimly-lighted hall,
And heard a lanthorn-jaw'd Philosopher,
Clawing his straw-like bunch of yellow hair,
With skeletonian periods and a voice
Shrill as the grating of two bones. "O Soul,"
Quoth he, "O beauteousness we name the Soul,
Thou art the Flower of all the life o' the World,
And not in every clod of flesh shoots forth
The perfect apparition of thy tints
Immortal! Flower and scented bloom of things,
Thou growest on no dunghill in the sun!"
A flower, a flower immortal? How I laugh'd!

Clip me the lily from its secret roots,
And farewell all the wonder of the flower !

That self-same day, in that same city of souls,
I saw the King, a man of flesh and blood,
In gorgeous raiment. O the little eyes
Glimmering underneath the golden crown,
While sitting on a throne in open court,
Fountains of perfume sprinkling him with spray,
He heard the gray men of his kingdom speak
Of mighty public matters solemnly,
And nodding grave approval, all the while
Crack'd filberts like a monkey ; yet at times
His shadow, and the shadow of his throne,
Falling against a grand sarcophagus
That filled one corner of the fountain'd court,
Awoke a nameless trouble, and the more
The sun shone, deeper on the tomb close by
The double shadow linger'd. Then methought
I was transported to a marvellous land,

A mighty forest of primæval growth
Brooding in its own darkness—underwood
Breast-deep, and swarming thick with monstrous
 shapes ;

And from a bough above me, by his tail
A man-beast swung and glimmer'd down at me
With little eyes and shining ivory teeth.
Laugh with me ! Brute-beast and the small-eyed
 King

Seem'd brethren—face, eyes, mouth, and lips the
 same—

Only the brute-beast was the happier,
Since never nameless trouble filled his eyes,
Because his ghost upon the glimmering grass
Beneath him quivered, while he poised above
With philosophic swing by claws and tail.

“ O Soul the Flower of all the life o' the World,
O perfect Flower and scented bloom of things ! ”
O birth betoken'd in that windy hour,
When, sloughing off the brute, we stand and groan,

First frighten'd by the Shadow that has chased
Our changes up through all the grooves of Time !

Lift up thine eyes, old man, and look on me :
Like thee, a dark point in the scheme of things,
Where the dumb Spirit that pervadeth all—
Grass, trees, beasts, man—and lives and grows in all—
Pauses upon itself, and awe-struck feels
The shadow of the next and imminent
Transfiguration. So, a living *Man* !
That entity within whose brooding brain
Knowledge begins and ends—that point in time
When time becomes the shadow of a Dial,—
That dreadful living and corporeal Hour,
Who, wafted by an unseen Hand apart
From the wild rush of temporal things that pass,
Pauses and listens,—listening sees his face
Glassed in still waters of eternity,—
Gazes in awe at his own loveliness,
And fears it,—glanceth with affrighted eyes

Backward and forward, and beholds all dark,
Alike the place whence he unconscious came,
And that to which he conscious drifteth on,—
Yet seeth before him, wheresoe'er he turn,
The Shadow of himself, presaging doom.

II.

THE RAINBOW.

THE OLD MAN SPEAKS.

Mine eyes are dim. Where am I? Is this Snow
Falling in the cold air? All darkeneth,—
As if between me and the light there stood
Some shape that lived. My God, is this the end?

ORM.

Not yet! not yet! Look up! Thou livest yet!
'Tis but a little faintness, and will pass!

OLD MAN.

Pass? All things pass. The light, the morning dew,
The power that plotted and the foot that clomb;
And delicate bloom of life upon the flesh
Fading like peach-bloom 'neath a finger-press.
O God, to blossom like a flower in a day,

Then wear a winter in slow withering. . . .
Why not with sun-flash, Lord, or bolt of fire? . . .
Where am I?

ORM.

On the lonely heights of Earth;
Beneath thee lies the Ocean, and above thee
The hills stand silent in the setting sun.

OLD MAN.

What forms are these that come and change and go?

ORM.

Desolate shadows of the gathering Rain.

OLD MAN.

What sound is that I hear?

ORM.

The homeless Wind
Shivering behind the shadows as they glide,
And moaning.

OLD MAN.

Ah !

ORM.

Some phantom of the brain
Appalleth thee ! Cling to me ! Courage !

OLD MAN.

Hark !

Dost thou not hear ?

ORM.

What ?

OLD MAN.

Voices of the shapes
That yonder, with their silvern robes wind-blown,
All faint and shadowless against the light
Beckon me ! Hush ! They sing a lullaby !
They are the spirits that so long ago
Sung round my cradle,—and they sing the same,—

Though I am grown the ghost of that fair time.
No, faces! These are faces I remember!
A fair face that, sweet in its golden hair—
And lower, see! a little pale-faced child's,
Sad as a star. "Father!" A voice cried "Father!"
Lift me up! Look! How they are gathering!
All sing! All beckon!

ORM.

. . . 'Tis the end indeed.

Within his breast the life-blood of the heart
Swells like a breaking wave, as, clinging round me,
He yearneth, fascinated yet afraid,
With wild dim eyes that look on vacancy!

OLD MAN.

What gleameth yonder in the brightening air?

ORM.

The Spirit of the Rainbow hovering faint
Amid the wind-blown shadows of the Rain.

OLD MAN.

Shadows! I see them—all the Shadows—see!
Uprising from the wild green sea of graves
That beats forlorn about the shores of earth.
Shadows—behold them!—how they gather and
gather,
More and yet more, darker and darker yet;
Drifting with a low moan of mystery
Upward, still upward, till they almost touch
The bright dim edge of the Bow, but there they pause,
Struggling in vain against a breath from heaven,
And blacken. Hark! their sound is like a Sea!
Above them, with how dim a light divine,
Burneth the Bow,—and lo! it is a Bridge,
Dim, many-colour'd, strangely brightening,
Whereon all faint and fair and shadowless
Spirits like those, with faces I remember,
With a low sound like the soft rain in spring,
With a faint echo of the cradle song,

Coming and going, beckon me ! I come !
Who holds me ? Touch me not. O help ! I am
called !

Ah !

[*Dies.*

ORM.

Gone ! Dead ! Something very cold past by
And touched my cheek like breath ; even then, O God,
My comrade heard Thy summons, and behold !
Here lieth, void and cold and tenantless,
His feeble habitation. Poor gray hairs
Thin with long blowing in the windy cold,
At last ye sadden ruin ! poor sweet lips,
Ye are dewless, ye are silent ! poor worn heart,
No more shalt thou, like to a worn-out watch,
Tick feebly out the time !

O Shadow sad,
Monitor, haunter, waiter till the end,
Brother of that which darkeneth at my feet,
Hast thou too fled, and dost thou follow still

The Spirit's quest divine. Nay, thou dark ghost !
Thy work is done for ever—thou art doom'd—
A breath from heaven holds thee to the ground,
And here unto the ruin thou art chained,
Moveless, and dark, no more the ghost of life,
But dead, the shadow of a thing of stone.

Thus far, no further, Shadow !—but O brother,
O Spirit, where art *thou* ? From what far height
Up yonder, pausing for a moment's space,
Lookest thou back thy blessing ? Art thou
free ?

Dost thou still hunger upward seeking rest,
Because some new horizon strange as ours
Shuts out the prospect of the place of peace ?
Art thou a wave that, having broken once,
Gatherest up a glorious crest once more,
And glimmerest onward,—but to break again ;
Or dost thou smooth thyself to perfect peace
In tranquil sight of some Eternal Shore ?

From the still region whither thou hast fled
No answer cometh ; but with dewy wings
Brightening before it dieth, how divine
Burneth the Rainbow, at its earthliest edge
Now fading like a flower ! Is it indeed
A Bridge whereon fair spirits come and go ?
O Brother, didst thou glide to peace that way ?
Silent—all silent—dimmer, dimmer yet,
Hue by hue dying, creeping back to heaven—
O let me too pass by it up to God !
Too late—it fadeth, faint and far away !

The Shadows gather round me—from the ground
My dark familiar looketh silently.
O Shadows, be at peace, for ye shall rest,
Yea, surely ye shall cease ; for now, as ever,
Out of your cloudy being springs serene
The Bow of Mystery that spans the globe !

The beautiful Bow of thoughts ineffable,

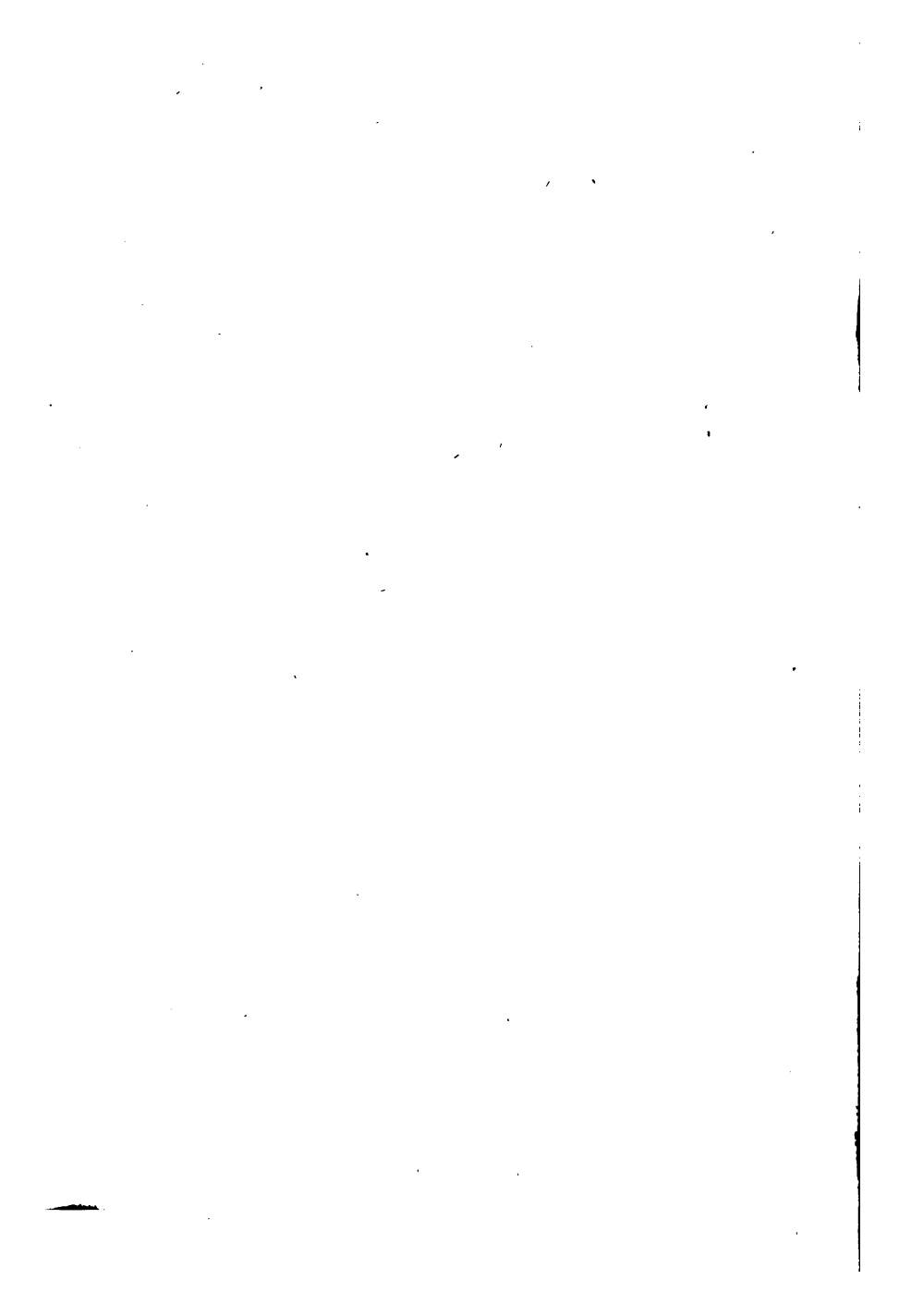
Last consequence of this fair cloud of flesh !
The dim miraculous Iris of sweet Dream !
Rainbow of promise ! Colour, Light, and Soul !
That comes, dies, comes again, and ever draws
Its strangest source from tears—that lives, that dies—
That is, is not—now here, now faded wholly—
Ever assuring, ever blessing us,
Ever eluding, ever beckoning,
Born of our essence, yet more strange than we,
As human, yet more beautiful tenfold,—
Rising in earth out of our cloudy being,
Touching forlornest places with its tints,
Strewing the sea with opal, scattering roses
Across the hollow pathways of the wind,
Fringing the clouds with flowers of crimson fire,
And melting, melting (whither our wild eyes
Follow imploring, whither our weak feet
Totter for ever), melting far away,
Yonder ! upon the dimmest peak of Heaven !



III.

SONGS OF CORRUPTION.

*Songs of Corruption, woven thus,
With tender thoughts and tremulous,
Sitting with a solemn face
In an island burying-place,
While weary waves broke sad and slow
O'er weedy wastes of sand below,
And stretch'd on every side of me
The rainy grief of the gray Sea.*



III.

SONGS OF CORRUPTION.

I.

PHANTASY.

If thou art an Angel,
Who hath sent thee,
O Phantasy, brooding
Over my pale wife's sleeping?
In the darkness
I am listening
For the rustle of thy robe ;
Would I might feel thee breathing,
Would I might hear thee speaking,
Would I might only touch thee
By the hand !

She is very cold,
My wife is very cold,
Her eyes are withered,
Her breath is dried like dew ;—
The sound of my weeping
Disturbeth her not ;
Thy shadow, O Phantasy,
Lieth like moonlight
Upon her features,
And the lines of her mouth
Are very sweet.

In the night
I heard my pale wife moaning,
Yet did not know
What made her afraid.
My pale wife said,
“ I am very cold,”
And shrank away from thee,
Though I saw thee not ;

And she kissed me and went to sleep,
And gave a little start upon my arm
When on her living lips
Thy freezing finger was laid.

What art thou—
Art thou God's Angel?
Or art thou only
The chilly night-wind,
Stealing downward
From the regions where the sun
Dwelleth alone with his shadow
On a waste of snow?
Art thou the water or earth?
Or art thou the fatal air?
Or art thou only
An apparition
Made by the mist
Of mine own eyes weeping?

She is very cold,
My wife is very cold !
I will kiss her,
And the silver-haired mother will kiss her,
And the little children will kiss her ;
And then we will wrap her warm,
And hide her in a hollow space ;
And the house will be empty
Of thee, O Phantasy,
Cast on the unhappy household
By the strange white clay.
Much I marvel, O Phantasy,
That one so gentle,
So sweet, when living,
Should cast a shadow as vast as thine ;
For, lo ! thou loomest
Upward and heavenward,
Hiding the sunlight,
Blackening the snow,

And the pointing of thy finger

Fadeth far away

On the sunset-tinged edges,

Where Man's company ends,

And God's loneliness begins.

II.

THE DREAM OF THE WORLD WITHOUT DEATH.

Now, sitting by her side, worn out with weeping,
Behold, I fell to sleep, and had a vision,
Wherein I heard a wondrous voice intoning :

Crying aloud, "The Master on His throne
Openeth now the seventh seal of wonder,
And beckoneth back the angel men name Death.

And at His feet the mighty Angel kneeleth,
Breathing not ; and the Lord doth look upon him,
Saying, "Thy wanderings on earth are ended."

And lo ! the mighty Shadow sitteth idle
Even at the silver gates of heaven,
Drowsily looking in on quiet waters,

And puts his silence among men no longer.

*

The world was very quiet. Men in traffic
Cast looks over their shoulders ; pallid seamen
Shiver'd to walk upon the decks alone ;

And women barred their doors with bars of iron,
In the silence of the night ; and at the sunrise
Trembled behind the husbandmen afield.

I could not see a kirkyard near or far ;
I thirsted for a green grave, and my vision
Was weary for the white gleam of a tombstone.

But hearkening dumbly, ever and anon
I heard a cry out of a human dwelling,
And felt the cold wind of a lost one's going.

One struck a brother fiercely, and he fell,
And faded in a darkness ; and that other
Tore his hair, and was afraid, and could not perish.

One struck his aged mother on the mouth,
And she vanished with a gray grief from his hearth-
stone.

One melted from her bairn, and on the ground

With sweet unconscious eyes the bairn lay smiling.
And many made a weeping among mountains,
And hid themselves in caverns, and were drunken.

I heard a voice from out the beauteous earth,
Whose side rolled up from winter into summer,
Crying, "I am grievous for my children."

I heard a voice from out the hoary ocean,
Crying, "Burial in the breast of me were better,
Yea, burial in the salt flags and green crystals."

I heard a voice from out the hollow ether,
Saying, "The thing ye cursed hath been abolished—
Corruption, and decay, and dissolution!"

And the world shrieked, and the summer-time was
bitter,
And men and women feared the air behind them ;
And for lack of its green graves the world was hateful.

*

Now at the bottom of a snowy mountain
I came upon a woman thin with sorrow,
Whose voice was like the crying of a sea-gull,

Saying, "O Angel of the Lord, come hither,
And bring me him I seek for on thy bosom,
That I may close his eyelids and embrace him.

"I curse thee that I cannot look upon him !
I curse thee that I know not he is sleeping !
Yet know that he has vanished upon God !

"I laid my little girl upon a wood-bier,
And very sweet she seemed, and near unto me ;
And slipping flowers into her shroud was comfort.

F

" I put my silver mother in the darkness,
And kissed her, and was solaced by her kisses,
And set a stone, to mark the place, above her.

" And green, green were their quiet sleeping-places,
So green that it was pleasant to remember
That I and my tall man would sleep beside them.

" The closing of dead eyelids is not dreadful,
For comfort comes upon us when we close them,
And tears fall, and our sorrow grows familiar ;

" And we can sit above them where they slumber,
And spin a dreamy pain into a sweetness,
And know indeed that we are very near them.

" But to reach out empty arms is surely dreadful,
And to feel the hollow empty world is awful,
And bitter grow the silence and the distance.

"There is no space for grieving or for weeping ;
No touch, no cold, no agony to strive with,
And nothing but a horror and a blankness !"

*

Now behold I saw a woman in a mud-hut
Raking the white spent embers with her fingers,
And fouling her bright hair with the white ashes.

Her mouth was very bitter with the ashes ;
Her eyes with dust were blinded ; and her sorrow
Sobbed in the throat of her like gurgling water.

And all around the voiceless hills were hoary,
But red light scorched their edges ; and above her
There was a soundless trouble of the vapours.

"Whither, and O whither," said the woman,
"O Spirit of the Lord, hast thou conveyed them,
My little ones, my little son and daughter ?

"For, lo ! we wandered forth at early morning,
And winds were blowing round us, and their mouths
Blew rose-buds to the rose-buds, and their eyes

"Looked violets at the violets, and their hair
Made sunshine in the sunshine, and their passing
Left a pleasure in the dewy leaves behind them ;

"And suddenly my little son looked upward,
And his eyes were dried like dew-drops ; and his going
Was like a blow of fire upon my face.

"And my little son was gone. My little daughter
Looked round me for him, clinging to my vesture ;
But the Lord had drawn him from me, and I knew it

"By the sign He gives the stricken, that the lost one
Lingers nowhere on the earth, on hill or valley,
Neither underneath the grasses nor the tree-roots.

"And my shriek was like the splitting of an ice-reef,
And I sank among my hair, and all my palm
Was moist and warm where the little hand had filled it.

"Then I fled and sought him wildly, hither and
thither—

Though I knew that he was stricken from me wholly
By the token that the Spirit gives the stricken.

"I sought him in the sunlight and the starlight,
I sought him in great forests, and in waters
Where I saw mine own pale image looking at me.

"And I forgot my little bright-haired daughter,
Though her voice was like a wild-bird's far behind me,
Till the voice ceased, and the universe was silent.

"And stilly, in the starlight, came I backward
To the forest where I missed him; and no voices
Brake the stillness as I stooped down in the starlight,

“ And saw two little shoes filled up with dew,
And no mark of little footsteps any farther,
And knew my little daughter had gone also.”

*

But beasts died : yea, the cattle in the yoke,
The milk-cow in the meadow, and the sheep,
And the dog upon the door-step ; and men envied.

And birds died ; yea, the eagle at the sun-gate,
The swan upon the waters, and the farm-fowl,
And the swallows on the housetops ; and men envied.

And reptiles ; yea, the toad upon the roadside,
The slimy, speckled snake among the grass,
The lizard on the ruin ; and men envied.

The dog in lonely places cried not over
The body of his master ; but it missed him,
And whined into the air, and died, and rotted.

The traveller's horse lay swollen in the pathway,
And the blue fly fed upon it; but no traveller
Was there; nay, not his footprint on the ground.

The cat mewed in the midnight, and the blind
Gave a rustle, and the lamp burnt blue and faint,
And the father's bed was empty in the morning.

The mother fell to sleep beside the cradle,
Rocking it, while she slumbered, with her foot,
And wakened,—and the cradle there was empty.

I saw a two-year's child, and he was playing;
And he found a dead white bird upon the doorway,
And laughed, and ran to show it to his mother.

The mother moaned, and clutched him, and was
bitter,
And flung the dead white bird across the threshold;
And another white bird flitted round and round it,

And uttered a sharp cry, and twittered and twittered,
And lit beside its dead mate, and grew busy,
Strewing it over with green leaves and yellow.

*

So far, so far to seek for were the limits
Of affliction; and men's terror grew a homeless
Terror, yea, and a fatal sense of blankness.

There was no little token of distraction,
There was no visible presence of bereavement,
Such as the mourner easeth out his heart on.

There was no comfort in the slow farewell,
Nor gentle shutting of beloved eyes,
Nor beautiful broodings over sleeping features.

There were no kisses on familiar faces,
No weaving of white grave-clothes, no last pondering
Over the still wax cheeks and folded fingers.

There was no putting tokens under pillows,
There was no dreadful beauty slowly fading,
Fading like moonlight softly into darkness.

There were no churchyard paths to walk on, thinking
How near the well-beloved ones are lying.
There were no sweet green graves to sit and muse on,

Till grief should grow a summer meditation,
The shadow of the passing of an angel,
And sleeping should seem easy, and not cruel.

Nothing but wondrous parting and a blankness.

*

But I woke.

And, lo ! the burthen was uplifted,
And I prayed within the chamber where she
slumbered,
And my tears flowed fast and free, but were not bitter.

I eased my heart three days by watching near her,
And made her pillow sweet with scent and flowers,
And could bear at last to put her in the darkness.

And I heard the kirk-bells ringing very slowly,
And the priests were in their vestments, and the earth
Dripped awful on the hard wood, yet I bore it.

And I cried, "O unseen Sender of Corruption,
I bless Thee for the wonder of Thy mercy,
Which softeneth the mystery and the parting.

"I bless Thee for the change and for the comfort,
The bloomless face, shut eyes, and waxen fingers,—
For Sleeping, and for Silence, and Corruption."

III.

SOUL AND FLESH.

My Soul, thou art wed
To a perishable thing,
But death from thy strange mate
Shall sever thee full soon,
If thou wilt reap wings
Take all the Flesh can give :

The touch of the smelling dead,
The kiss of the maiden's mouth,
The sorrow, the hope, the fear,
That floweth along the veins :
Take all, nor be afraid ;
Cling close to thy mortal mate !

So shalt thou duly wring
Out of thy long embrace

The hunger and thirst whereof
The Master maketh thee wings,—
The beautiful, wondrous yearning,
The mighty thirst to endure.

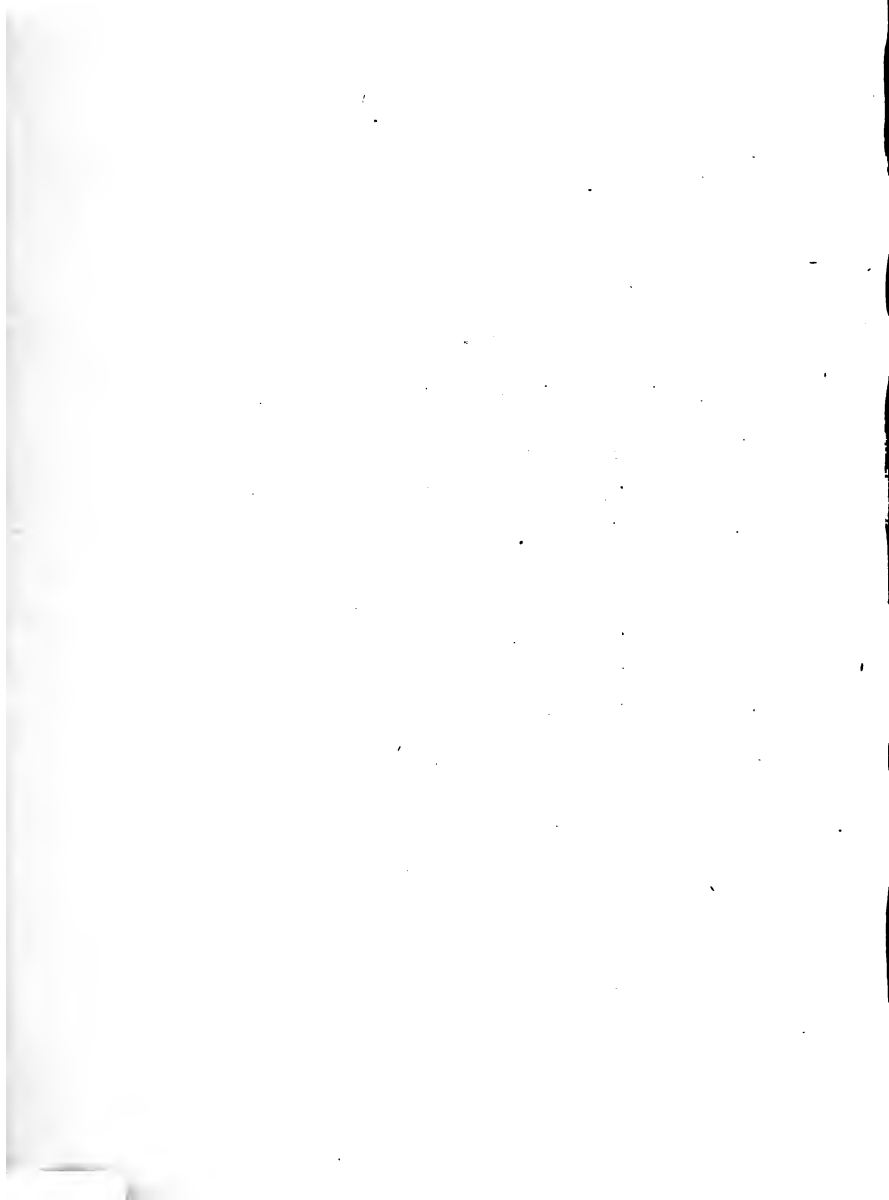
Be not afraid, my Soul,
To leave thy mate at last,
Though ye shall learn in time
To love each other well ;
But put her gently down
In the earth beneath thy feet.

And dry thine eyes and hasten
To the imperishable springs ;
And it shall be well for thee
In the beautiful Master's sight,
If it be found in the end
Thou hast used her tenderly.

IV.

THE SOUL AND THE DWELLING.

*A House miraculous of breath
The royal Soul inhabiteth.
Alone therein for evermore,
It seeks in vain to pass the door;
But through the windows of the eyne
Signalleth to its kin divine. . . .
This is a song Orm sang of old
To Oona with the locks of gold.*



IV.

THE SOUL AND THE DWELLING.

COME to me ! clasp me !

Spirit to spirit !

Bosom to bosom !

Tenderly, clingingly,

Mingle to one ! . . .

Now, from my kisses

Withdrawing, and blushing,

Why dost thou gaze on me ?

Why dost thou weep ?

Why dost thou cling to me,

Imploring, adoring ?

What are those meanings

That flash from thine eyes ?

Pitiful ! pitiful !

Now I conceive thee !—

Yea, it were easier

Striking two swords,

To weld them together,

Than spirit with spirit

To mingle, tho' rapture

Be perfect as this,

Shut in a tremulous

Prison, each spirit

Hungers and yearns—

Never, ah never,

Belovëd, belovëd,

Have these eyes look'd on

The face of thy Soul.

Ours are two dwellings,

Wondrously beautiful,

Made in the darkness

Of soft-tinted flesh :

In the one dwelling,
Prison'd I dwell,
And lo ! from the other
 Thou beckonest me !
I am a Soul !
Thou art a Soul !
These are our dwellings !
 O to be free !

Beauteous, beloved,
Is thy dear dwelling ;
All o'er it blowing
The roses of dawn—
Bright is the portal,
The dwelling is scented
 Within and without ;
Strange are the windows,
So clouded with azure,
The faces are hidden
 That look from within.

Now I approach thee,

Sweetness and odour

Tremble upon me—

Wild is the rapture !

Thick is the perfume !

Sweet bursts of music

Thrill from within !

Closer, yet closer !

Bosom to bosom !

Tenderly, clingingly,

Mingle to one. . . .

Ah ! but what faces

Are those that look forth ! . . .

Faces ? What faces ? As I speak they die,

And all my gaze is empty as of old.

O love ! the world was fair, and everywhere

Rose wondrous human dwellings like mine own,

And many of these were foul and dark with dust,

Haunted by things obscene, not beautiful,

But most were very royal, meet to serve
Angels for habitation. All alone
Brooded my Soul by a mysterious fire
Dim-burning, never-dying, from the first
Lit in the place by God ; the winds and rains
Struck on the abode and spared it ; day and night
Above it came and went ; and in the night
My Soul gazed from the threshold silently,
And saw the congregated lamps that swung
Above it in the dark and dreamy blue ;
And in the day my Soul gazed on the earth,
And sought the dwellings there for signs, and lo !
None answer'd ; for the Souls inhabitant
Drew coldly back and darken'd ; and I said,
“ In all the habitations I behold,
Some old, some young, some fair, and some not fair,
There dwells no Soul I know.” But as I spake,
I saw beside me in a dreamy light
Thy habitation, so serene and fair,
So stately in a rosy dawn of day,

That all my Soul look'd forth and cried, " Behold,
The sweetest dwelling in the whole wide world !"
And thought not of the inmate, but gazed on,
Lingeringly, hushfully ; for as I gazed
Something came glistening up into thine eyes,
And beckon'd, and a murmur from the portal,
A murmur and a perfume, floated hither,
Thrill'd thro' my dwelling, making every chamber
Tremble with mystical,
Dazzling desire !

. . Come to me ! close to me !
Bosom to bosom !
Tenderly, clingingly,
Mingle to one !
Wildly within me
Some eager inmate
Rushes and trembles,
Peers from the eyes
And calls in the ears,

Yearns to thee, cries to thee !
Claiming old kinship
In lives far removed ! . .
Vainly, ah vainly !
Pent in its prison
Must each miraculous
Spirit remain,—
Yet inarticulate,
Striving to language,
Music and memory,
Rapture and dream !

Rapture and dream ! Belov'd one, in vain
My spirit seeks for utterance. Alas,
Not yet shall there be speech. Not yet, not yet,
One dweller in a mortal tenement
Can know what secret faces hide away
Within the neighbouring dwelling. Ah beloved,
The mystery, the mystery ! We cry
For God's face, who have never looked upon

The poorest Soul's face in the wonderful
Soul-haunted world. A spirit once there dwelt
Beside me, close as thou—two wedded souls,
We mingled—flesh was mixed with flesh—we knew
All joys, all unreserves of mingled life—
Yea, not a sunbeam filled the house of one
But touched the other's threshold. Hear me swear
I never knew that Soul ! All touch, all sound,
All light was insufficient. The Soul, pent
In its strange chambers, cried to mine in vain—
We saw each other not : but oftentimes
When I was glad, the windows of my neighbour
Were dark and drawn, as for a funeral ;
And sometimes, when, most weary of the world,
My Soul was looking forth at dead of night,
I saw the neighbouring dwelling brightly lit,
The happy windows flooded full of light,
As if a feast was being held within.
Yet were there passing flashes, random gleams,
Low sounds, from the inhabitant divine

I knew not ; and I shrunk from some of these
In a mysterious pain. At last, Belovèd,
The frail fair mansion where that spirit dwelt
Totter'd and trembled, thro' the wondrous flesh
A dim sick glimmer from the fire within
Grew fainter, fainter. "I am going away,"
The Spirit seemed to cry ; and as it cried,
Stood still and dim and very beautiful
Up in the windows of the eyes—there linger'd,
First seen, last seen, a moment, silently—
So different, more beautiful tenfold
Than all that I had dreamed—I sobbed aloud
"Stay ! stay !" but at the one despairing word
The spirit faded,—from the hearth within
The dim fire died with one last quivering
gleam—
The house became a ruin ; and I moaned
"God help me ! 'twas herself that look'd at me !
First seen ! I never knew her face before ! . .
Too late ! too late ! too late !"

. . . Yea, from my forehead!

Kiss the dark fantasy!

Tenderly, clingingly,

Mingle to one!

Is not this language?

Music and memory,

Rapture and dream?—

O in the dewy-bright

Day-dawn of love,

Is it not wondrous,

Blush-red with roses,

The beautiful, mystical

House of the Soul!

Lo in mine innermost .

Chambers is floating

Soft perfume and music

That tremble from *thee*. . . .

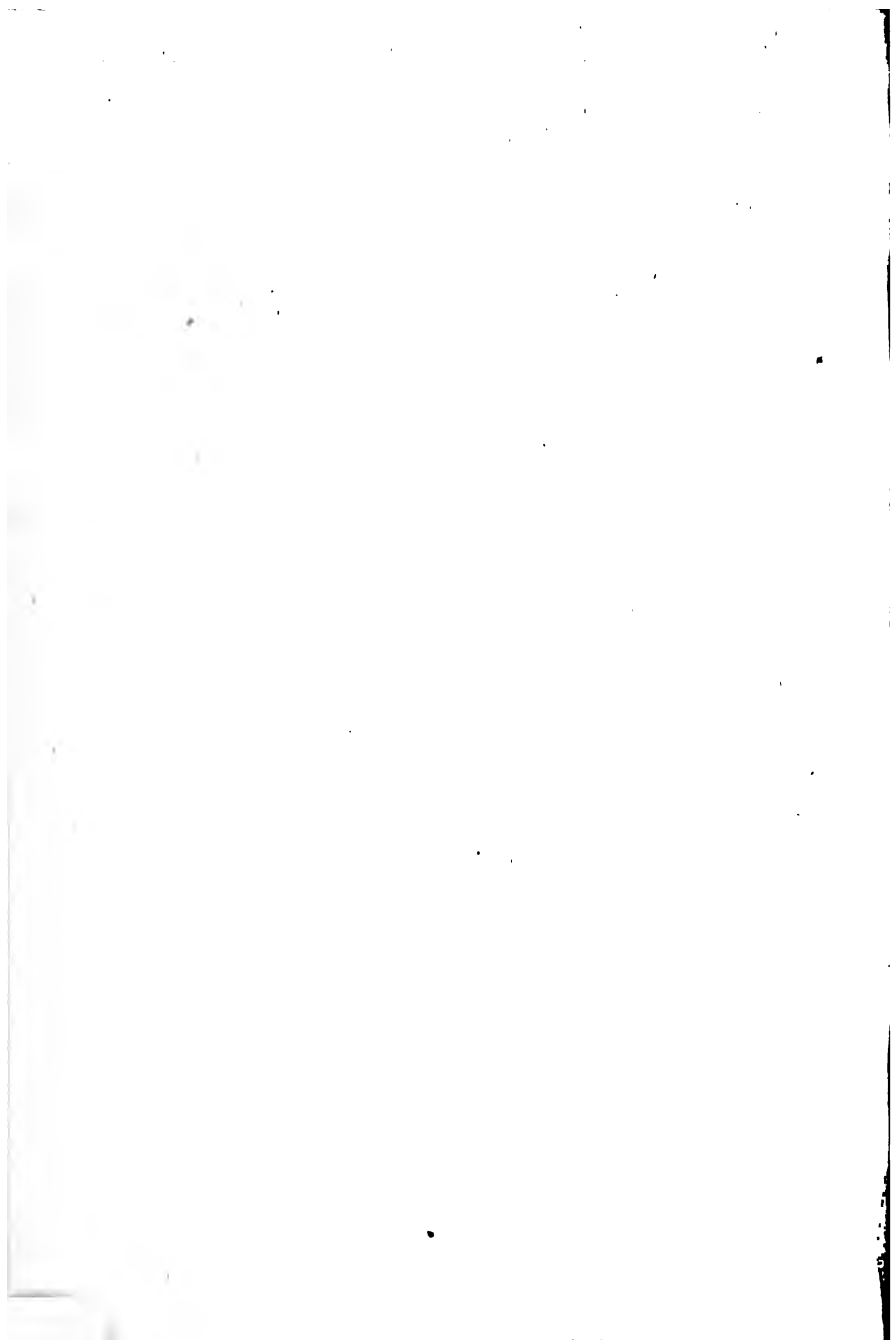
Ah, but what faces

Are these, that look forth?

. . . Sit still, Belovëd, while I search thy looks
For memories. O thou art beautiful !
Crownëd with silken gold,—soft amber tints
Coming and going on thy peach-hued flesh,—
Thy breath a perfume,—thy blue eyes twain stars—
Thy lips like dewy rosebuds to the eye,
Tho' living to the touch. O royal abode,
Flooded with music, light, and precious scent,
Curtainëd soft with subtle mystery !
Nay, stir not, but gaze on, still and serene,
Possessing me with thy superb still sweep
Of eyes ineffable—sit still, my queen,
And let me, clinging on thee, court the ways
Wherein I know thee. Nay, even now, Belovëd,
When all the world like some vast tidal wave
Withdraws and leaves us on a golden shore
Alone together—when thou most art mine—
When the winds blow for us, and the soft stars
Are shining for us, where we dream apart,—
Now our two dwellings in a dizzy hour

Have mingled their foundations,—clinging thus
And hungering round thee in mine ecstasy,—
Belovéd, do I know thee? Hath my Soul
Spoken to thine the imperial speech of Souls,
Perfect in meaning and in melody?
Tell me, Belovéd, while thou sittest so,
Mine own, my queen, my palace of delights,
What lights are these that pass and come again
Within thee? Is the Spirit looking forth,
Or is it but the glittering gleams of time
Playing on vacant windows? Can I swear
Thou thinkest of me now at all? Behold
Now all thy beauty is suffused with brightness—
Thou blushest and thou smilest. Tell me true,
Thou then wast far within, and with that cry
I woke thee out of dream. O speak to me!—
Soul's speech, Belovéd! Do not smile that way—
A flood of brightness issues from thy door,
But mine is scarcely bright. Lovest thou me,
Belovéd, my belovéd? Soul belovéd,

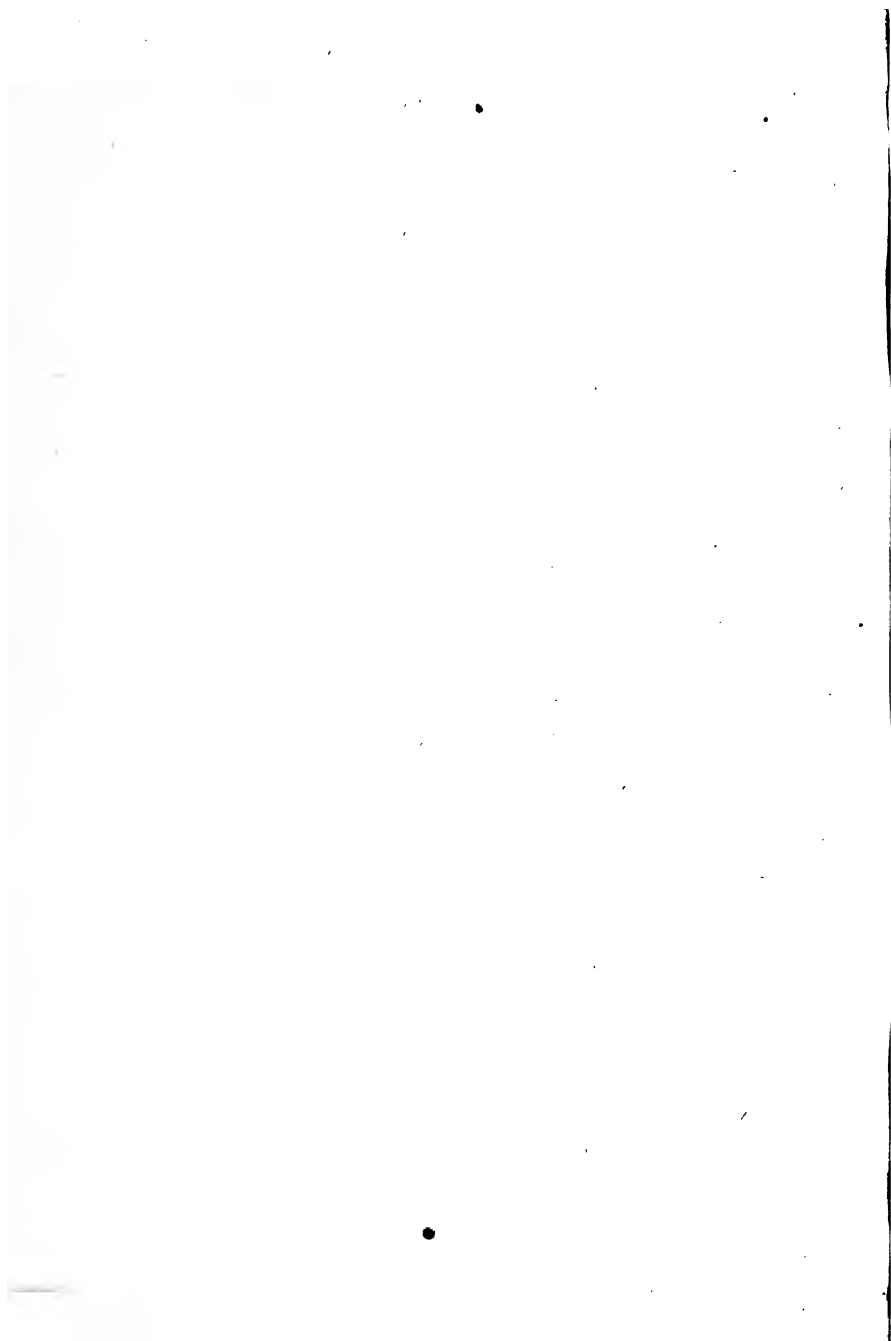
Do I possess thee? Sight and scent and touch
Are insufficient. Open ! let me in
To the strange chambers I have never seen !
Heart of the rose, unopen ! or I die !



V.

SONGS OF SEEKING.

*Songs of Seeking, day by day
Sung while wearying on the way,—
Feeble cries of one who knows
Nor whence he comes, nor whither goes,
Yet of his own free will doth wear
The bloody Cross of those who fare
Upward and in sad accord,—
The footsore Seekers of the Lord.*



V.

SONGS OF SEEKING.

I.

O THOU whose ears incline unto my singing,
Woman or man, thou surely bearest thy burden,
And I who sing, and all men, bear their burdens.

Even as a meteor-stone from suns afar,
I fell unto the ways of life and breathed,
Wherefore to much on earth I feel a stranger.

I found myself in a green norland valley,
A place of gleaming waters and gray heavens,
And weirdly woven colours in the air.

A basin round whose margin rose the mountains
Green-based, snow-crown'd, and windy saeters midway,
And the thin line of a spire against the mountains.

Around were homes of peasants rude and holy,
Who look'd upon the mountains and the forests,
On the waters, on the vapours, without wonder ;

Who, happy in their labours six days weekly,
Were happy on their knees upon the seventh.
But I wonder'd, being strange, and was not happy.

For I cried : " O Thou Unseen, how shall I praise
Thee—

How shall I name Thee glorious whom I know not—
If Thou art as these say, I scarce conceive thee.

" Unfold to me the image of Thy features,
Come down upon my heart, that I may know Thee ;"—
And I made a song of seeking, on a mountain.

II.

QUEST.

As in the snowy stillness,
Where the stars shine greenly
In a mirror of ice,
The Reindeer abideth alone,
And speedeth swiftly
From her following shadow
In the moon,—
I speed for ever
From the mystic shape
That my life projects,
And my soul perceives ;
And I loom for ever
Through desolate regions
Of wondrous thought,
And I fear the thing
That follows me,
And cannot escape it
Night or day.

Doth Thy winged lightning
Strike, O Master !
The timid Reindeer
Flying her shade ?
Will Thy wrath pursue me,
Because I cannot
Escape the shadow
Of the thing I am ?

I have pried and pondered,
I have agonized,
I have sought to find Thee,
Yet still must roam,
Affrighted, fleeing Thee,
Chased by the shadow
Of the thing I am,
Through desolate regions
Of wondrous thought !

III.

THE HAPPY EARTH.

Sweet, sweet it was to sit in leafy Forests,
In a green darkness, and to hear the stirring
Of strange breaths hither and thither in the branches ;

And sweet it was to sail on crystal Waters,
Between the dome above and the dome under,
The Hills above me, and the Hills beneath me ;

And sweet it was to watch the wondrous Lightning
Spring flashing at the earth, and slowly perish
Under the falling of the summer Rain.

I loved all grand and gentle and strange things,—
The wind-flower at the tree-root, and the white cloud,
The strength of Mountains, and the power of Waters.

And unto me all seasons utter'd pleasure :
Spring, standing startled, listening to the skylark,
The wild flowers from her lap unheeded falling ;

And Summer, in her gorgeous loose apparel ;
And Autumn, with her dreamy silver eyebrows ;
And Winter, with his white hair blown about him.

Yea, everywhere there stirred a deathless beauty,
A gleaming and a flashing into change,
An under-stream of sober consecration.

Yet nought endured, but all the glory faded,
And power and sweet and sorrow were interwoven ;
There was no single presence of the Spirit.

IV.

O UNSEEN ONE !

Because Thou art beautiful,
Because Thou art mysterious,
Because Thou art strong,
Or because Thou art pitiless,
Shall my soul worship Thee,
O thou Unseen One?

As men bow to monarchs,
As slaves to their owners,
Shall I bow to Thee?
As one that is fearful,
As one that is insolent,
Shall I pray to Thee?

Wert Thou a demigod,
Wert Thou an angel,
Lip-worship might serve ;

VI.

THE CITIES.

I took my staff and wandered o'er the mountains,
And came among the heaps of gold and silver,
The gorgeous desolation of the Cities.

My trouble grew tenfold when I beheld
The agony and burden of my fellows,
The pains of sick men and the groans of hungry.

I saw the good man tear his hair and weep ;
I saw the bad man tread on human necks
Prospering and blaspheming ; and I wondered.

The silken-natured woman was a bond-slave ;
The gross man foul'd her likeness in high places ;
The innocent were heart-wrung ; and I wondered.

The gifts of earth are given to the base ;
The monster of the Cities spurned the martyr ;
The martyr died, denying ; and I wondered.

VII.

THE PRIESTS.

Three Priests in divers vestments passed and
whispered :

“Worship the one God, stranger, or thou diest ;
Yea, worship, or thy tortures shall be endless.”

I cried, “Which God, O wise ones, must I
worship ?”

And neither answer'd, but one showed a Picture,
A fair Man dying on a Cross of wood.

And this one said, “The others err, O stranger !
Repent, and love thy brother,—’tis enough !
The Doom of Dooms is only for the wicked.”

I turned and cried unto him, “Who is wicked ?”
He vanish’d, and within a house beside me
I heard a hard man bless his little children.

My heart was full of comfort for the wicked,
Mine eyes were cleared with love, and everywhere
The wicked wore a piteousness like starlight.

I felt my spirit foul with misconceivings,
I thought of old transgressions and was humble,
I cried: "O God, whose doom is on the wicked !

"Thou art not He for whom my being hungers !
The Spirit of the grand things and the gentle,
The strength of mountains and the power of waters !"

And lo ! that very night I had a Vision.

VIII.

THE LAMB OF GOD.

I.

I saw in a vision of the night
The Lamb of God, and it was white;
White as snow it wander'd thro'
Silent fields of harebell-blue,
Still it wandering fed, and sweet
Flower'd the stars around its feet.

2.

I heard in vision a strange voice
Cry aloud, "Rejoice & rejoice!
Dead men rise and come away,
Now it is the Judgment Day!"
And I heard the host intone
Round the footstool of the Throne.

3.

Then the vision pained my sight,
All I saw became so bright—

All the Souls of men were there,
All the Angels of the air ;
God was smiling on His seat,
And the Lamb was at His feet.

4.

Then I heard a voice—" 'Tis done !
Blest be those whom God hath won !"
And the loud hosannah grew,
And the golden trumpets blew,
And around the place of rest
Rose the bright mist of the Blest.

5.

Then suddenly I saw again,
Bleating like a thing in pain,
The Lamb of God ;—and all in fear
Gazed and cried as it came near,
For on its robe of holy white
Crimson blood-stains glimmer'd bright.

6.

O the vision of the night !
The Lamb of God ! the blood-stains bright !
In quiet waters of the skies
It bathed itself with piteous eyes—
Vainly on its raiment fell
Cleansing dews ineffable !

7.

All the while it cried for pain,
It could not wash away the stain—
All the gentle blissful sky
Felt the trouble of its cry—
All the streams of silver sheen
Sought it vain to make it clean.

8.

Where'er it went along the skies
The Happy turned away their eyes ;

Where'er it past from shore to shore
All wept for those whose blood it bore—
Its piteous cry filled all the air,
Till the dream was more than I could bear.

9.

And in the darkness of my bed
Weeping I awaken'd—
In the silence of the night,
Dying softly from my sight,
Melted that pale Dream of pain
Like a snow-flake from my brain.

IX.

DOOM.

Master, if there be Doom,
All men are bereaven !
If, in the universe,
One Spirit receive the curse,
Alas for Heaven !
If there be Doom for one,
Thou, Master, art undone.

Were I a Soul in heaven,
Afar from pain,
Yea, on Thy breast of snow,
At the scream of one below
I should scream again.
Art Thou less piteous than
The conception of a Man ?

THE
END

X.

GOD'S DREAM.

I hear a voice, "How should God pardon sin?
How should He save the sinner with the sin-
less?

That would be ill: the Lord my God is just."

Further I hear, "How should God pardon lust?
How should He comfort the adulteress?
That would be foul: the Lord my God is pure."

Further I hear, "How should God pardon blood?
How should the murtherer have a place in heaven
Beside the innocent life he took away?"

And God is on His throne; and in a dream
Sees mortals making figures out of clay,
Shapen like men, and calling them God's angels.

And sees the shapes look up into His eyes,
Exclaiming, "Thou dost ill to save this man;
Damn Thou this woman, and curse this cut-throat,
Lord!"

God dreams this, and His dreaming is the world ;
And thou and I are dreams within His dream ;
And nothing dieth God hath dreamt or thought.

XI.

FLOWER OF THE WORLD.

Wherever men sinned and wept,
I wandered in my quest ;
At last in a Garden of God
I saw the Flower of the World.

This Flower had human eyes,
Its breath was the breath of the mouth ;
Sunlight and starlight came,
And the Flower drank bliss from both.

Whatever was base and unclean,
Whatever was sad and strange,
Was piled around its roots ;
It drew its strength from the same.

Whatever was formless and base
Pass'd into fineness and form ;

Whatever was lifeless and mean
Grew into beautiful bloom.

Then I thought, "O Flower of the World!
Miraculous Blossom of things,
Light as a faint wreath of snow
Thou tremblest to fall in the wind.

"O beautiful Flower of the World,
Fall not nor wither away ;
He is coming—He cannot be far—
The Lord of the Flow'rs and the Stars.

And I cried, "O Spirit divine!
That walkest the Garden unseen,
Come hither, and bless, ere it dies,
The beautiful Flower of the World."

XII.

O SPIRIT !

Weary with seeking, weary with long waiting,
I fell upon my knees, and wept, exclaiming,
“ O Spirit of the grand things and the gentle !

“ Thou hidest from our seeking—Thou art crafty—
Thou wilt not let our hearts admit Thee wholly—
But believing hath a core of unbelieving—

“ A coward dare not look upon Thy features,
But museth in a cloud of misconceiving ;
The bravest man's conception is a coward's.

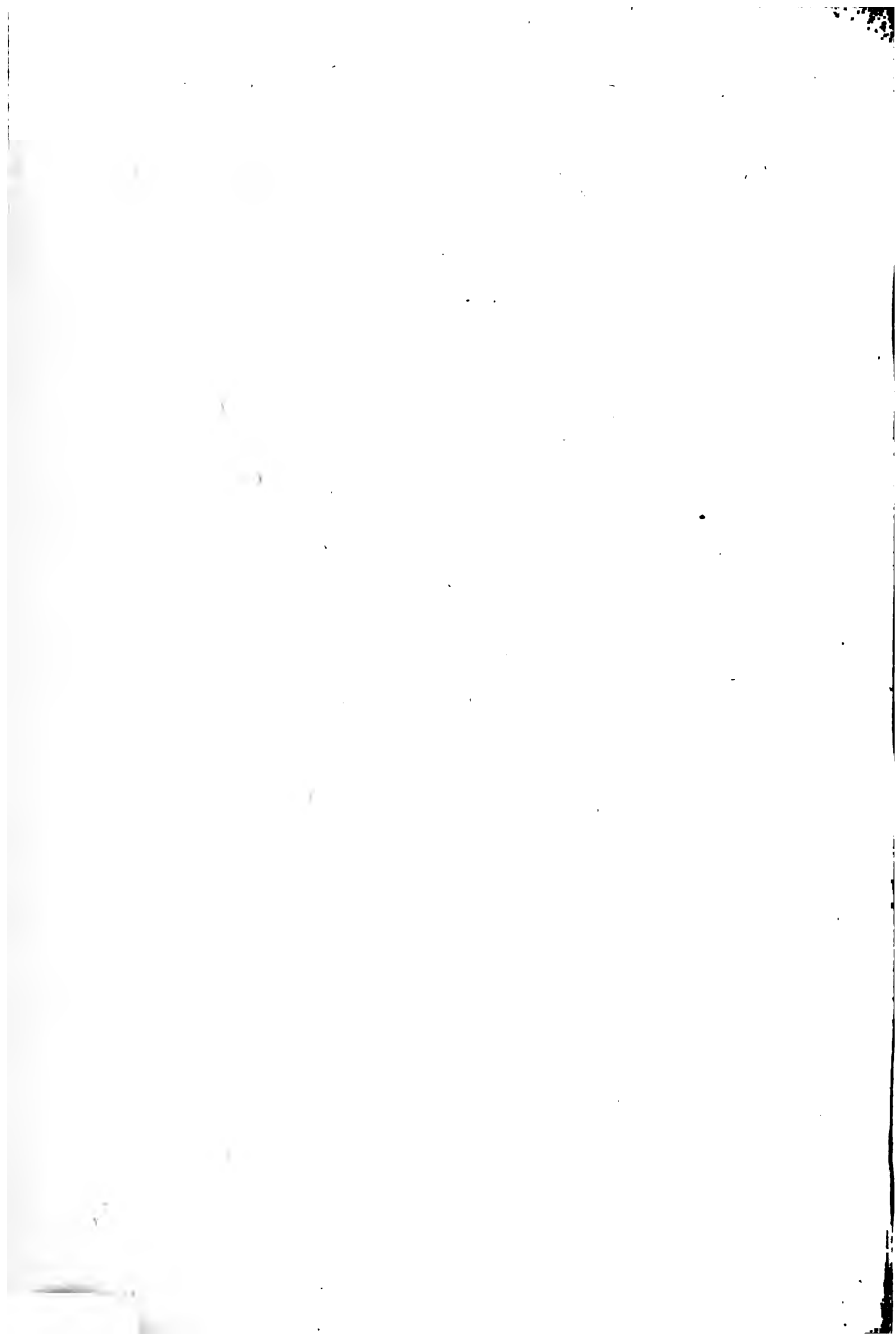
“ Wherefore, O wherefore, art Thou veil'd and hidden ?
The world were well, and wickedness were over,
If Thou upon Thy throne were one thing certain.”

And lo ! that very night I had a Vision.

VI.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL.

*Thou who the Face Divine wouldst see,
Think,—couldst thou bear the sight, and be ?
O waves of life and thought and dream,
Darkening in one mysterious Stream,
Flow on, flow loudly ; nor become
A glassy Mirror sad and dumb,
Whereon for evermore might shine
The dread peace of the Face Divine !—
Children of earth whose spirits fail,
Revere the Face, but bless the Veil !*



VI.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL.

I.

ORM'S VISION.

My Soul had a vision,
And in my Soul's vision
The Veil was lifted,
And the Face was there !

There was no portent
Of fire or thunder,
The wind was sleeping,
And above and under
All things lookt fair.
And the change came softly
Unaware :

On a golden morrow
The Veil was lifted,
And yea ! the ineffable Face was there.

My Soul saw the vision

From a silent spot—

Nay, of its likeness

Ask me not—

How should my Soul fathom

The formless features ?

Gaze at the Master

How should it dare ?

Only I flutter'd

To my knees and mutter'd

A moan, a prayer—

Silent, ineffable,

Gazing downward,

The Face was there !

This let me whisper :

It stirred not, changed not

Tho' the world stood still, amazed ;
But the Eyes within it,
Like the eyes of a painted picture,
Met and followed
The eyes of each that gazed.

II.

THE FACE AND THE WORLD.

Then my Soul heard a voice
Crying—"Wander forth
O'er hill and valley,
O'er the earth—
Behold the mortals
How they fare—
Now the great Father
Grants their prayer ;
Now every spirit
Of mortal race,
Since the Veil is lifted,
Beholds the Face !

I awoke my body,
And up the mountains,

With the sweet sun shining,
I wander'd free—
And the hills were pleasant,
Knee-deep in heather,
And the yellow eagle
Wheel'd over me—
And the streams were flowing,
And the lambs were leaping
Merrily !

But on the hill-tops
The shepherds gather'd,
Up-gazing dreamily
Into the silent air,
And close beside them
The eagle butcher'd
The crying lambkin,
But they did not see, nor care.
I saw the white flocks of the shepherds,

Like snow wind-lifted and driven,
Blow by, blow by !
And the terrible wolves behind them,
As wild as the winds, pursuing
With a rush and a tramp and a cry !

I passed the places
Of ice and snow,
And I saw a Hunter
Lying frozen,—
His eyes were seal'd—
He did not know ;
Drinking his heart's-blood,
Not looking upward,
Sat the soot-black raven
And the corby crow.

Then I knew they linger'd,
Tho' the Veil was lifted,
Death and Decay,

And my Spirit was heavy
 As I turned away ;
But my Spirit was brighter
As I saw below me
The glassy Ocean
 Glimmering,
With a white sail dipping
Against the azure
 Like a sea-bird's wing—
And all look'd pleasant,
 On sea and land,
The white cloud brooding,
And the white sail dipping,
And the village sitting
 On the yellow sand.

And beside the waters
My Soul saw the fishers
Staring upward,
 With dumb desire,

Tho' a mile to seaward,
With the gulls pursuing,
Shot past the herring
 With a trail like fire ;
Tho' the mighty Sea-snake
With her young was stranded
In the fatal shallows
 Of the shingly bay—
Tho' their bellies hunger'd,—
 What cared they ?

Hard by I noted
Little children,
Toddling and playing
 In a field o' hay—
The Face was looking,
But they were gazing
At one another,
 And what cared *they* ?
But one I noted,

A little Maiden,
Look'd up o' sudden
 And ceased her play,
And she dropt her garland
And stood upgazing,
With hair like sunlight,
 And face like clay.

All was most quiet
 In the air,
Save the children's voices
And the cry of dumb beasts,—
'Twas a weary Sabbath
 Everywhere—
Each soul an eyeball,
 Each face a stare ;—
And I left the place,
 And I wander'd free,
And the Eyes of the Face
 Still followed me !

At the good Priest's cottage

The gray-hair'd grandsire

Lay stiff in the garden—

For his Soul had fled—

And I cried in passing,

“ Oh ye within there,

Come forth in sorrow

And bury your dead.”

With his flock around him

Praying bareheaded,

The pale Priest, kneeling

All gaunt and gray,

Answer'd, “ Look upward !

Leave the dead to heaven !

God is yonder !

Behold, and pray !”

I was sick at heart

To hear and see,

And to feel the Face

Still following me.

And all seemed darkening,

And my heart sank down,—

As I saw afar off

A mighty Town—

When with no warning,

Slowly and softly

The beautiful Face withdrew,

And the whole world darken'd,

And the silence deepen'd,

And the Veil fell downward

With a silver glimmer of dew.

And I was calmer

As, slowly and sweetly,

Gather'd above me

Mysterious Light on Light,—

And weary with watching

I lay and slumber'd

In the mellow stillness
Of the blessed night.

. . When my Soul awaken'd
In the lonely place,
The Veil was lifted,
And, behold ! the Face—
And sick, heart-weary,
Onward I ran,
Thro' fields of harvest
Where the wheat hung wither'd,
Unreapt by man ;
And a ragged Idiot
Went gibbering gaily
Among the wheat,
In moist palms rubbing
The ears together ;
And he laugh'd, and beckon'd
That I should eat.

At the city gateway
The Sentinels gather'd,
Fearful and drunken
With eyes like glass—
Look up they dared not,
Lest, to their terror,
Some luminous Angel
Of awe should pass;
And my Soul passed swiftly
With a prayer,
And entered the City :—
Still and awful
Were street and square,
'Twas a piteous Sabbath
Everywhere—
Each soul an eyeball,
Each face a stare.

In pale groups gather'd
The Citizens,

The rich and poor men,
The lords, the lepers
 From their loathsome dens.
There was no traffic,
The heart of the City
 Stood silently ;
How could they barter,
How could they traffic,
 With the terrible Eyes to see.
Nay ! each man brooded
 On the Face alone,
Each Soul was an eyeball,
 Each Shape was a stone ;
And I saw the faces,
 And some were glad,
And some were pensive,
 And some were mad ;
But in all places,
 Hall, street, and lane,—

'Twas a frozen pleasure,
A frozen pain.

I passed the bearers
Of a sable bier,
They had dropt their burthen
To gaze in fear ;
From under the trappings
Of the death-cloth grand,
With a ring on the finger,
Glimmer'd the corpse's
Decaying hand.
I passed the bridal,
Clad bright and gay,
Frozen to marble
Upon its way.

Freely I wandered
Everywhere—

No mortal heeded
The passing footstep,
Palace and hovel
Were free as the mountain air.
Aye ! softly I enter'd
The carven court of stone,
And the fountains were splashing,
And the pale King sitting
Upon his jewell'd throne—
And before him gather'd
The Frail and Sickly,
The Poor and Old ;
And he open'd great coffers,
And gave thence freely
Fine gear and gold,—
Saying, " 'Tis written,
Who giveth freely
Shall in sooth be bless'd
Twenty-fold !"
But he look'd not upward,

And seem'd unconscious
Of the strange Eyes watching

O'er sea and land ;
Yet his eyelids quiver'd,
And his eyes looked sidelong,
And he hid in his bosom

A blood-stained hand ;
But the beggar people
Let the gold and raiment
Lie all unheeded ;

While with no speech,
Upward they lifted
Their wild pale features,
For the Face was mirror'd
In the eyes of each.

With the Face pursuing
I wandered onward,
Heart-sick, heart-sore,
And entered the fretted

Cathedral door ;
And I found the people
Huddled together,
Hiding their faces
In shame and sin,
For thro' the painted
Cathedral windows
The Eyes of Wonder
Were looking in !
And on the Altar
The wild Priest, startled,
Was gazing round him
With sickly stare,
And his limbs were palsied,
And he moaned for mercy—
More wonder-stricken
Than any there.

Then I fell at the Altar,
And wept, and murmur'd,

" My Soul, how fares it,

 This day, with *thee* ?—

Art thou contented

 To live and see,

Or were it better

 Not to be ? "

And my pale Soul whisper'd :

" Like a band that holdeth

And keepeth from growing

 A goodly tree,—

A terror hath me—

I feel not, stir not—

"Twere surely better

 Not to be ! "

Then a rush of visions

 Went wildly by—

My Soul beheld the marble World,

 And the luminous Face on high.

And methought, affrighted,
That the mortal race
Build cover'd cities
To hide the Face ;
And gather'd their treasures
Of silver and gold,
And sat amid them
In caverns cold ;
And ever nightly,
When the Face of Wonder
Withdrew from man,
Many started,
And hideous revel
Of the dark began.
And men no longer
Knew the common sorrow,
The common yearning,
The common love,
But each man's features
Were turn'd to marble,

Changelessly watching

The Face above—

A nameless trouble

Was in the air—

The heart of the World

Had no pulsation—

'Twas a piteous Sabbath

Everywhere !

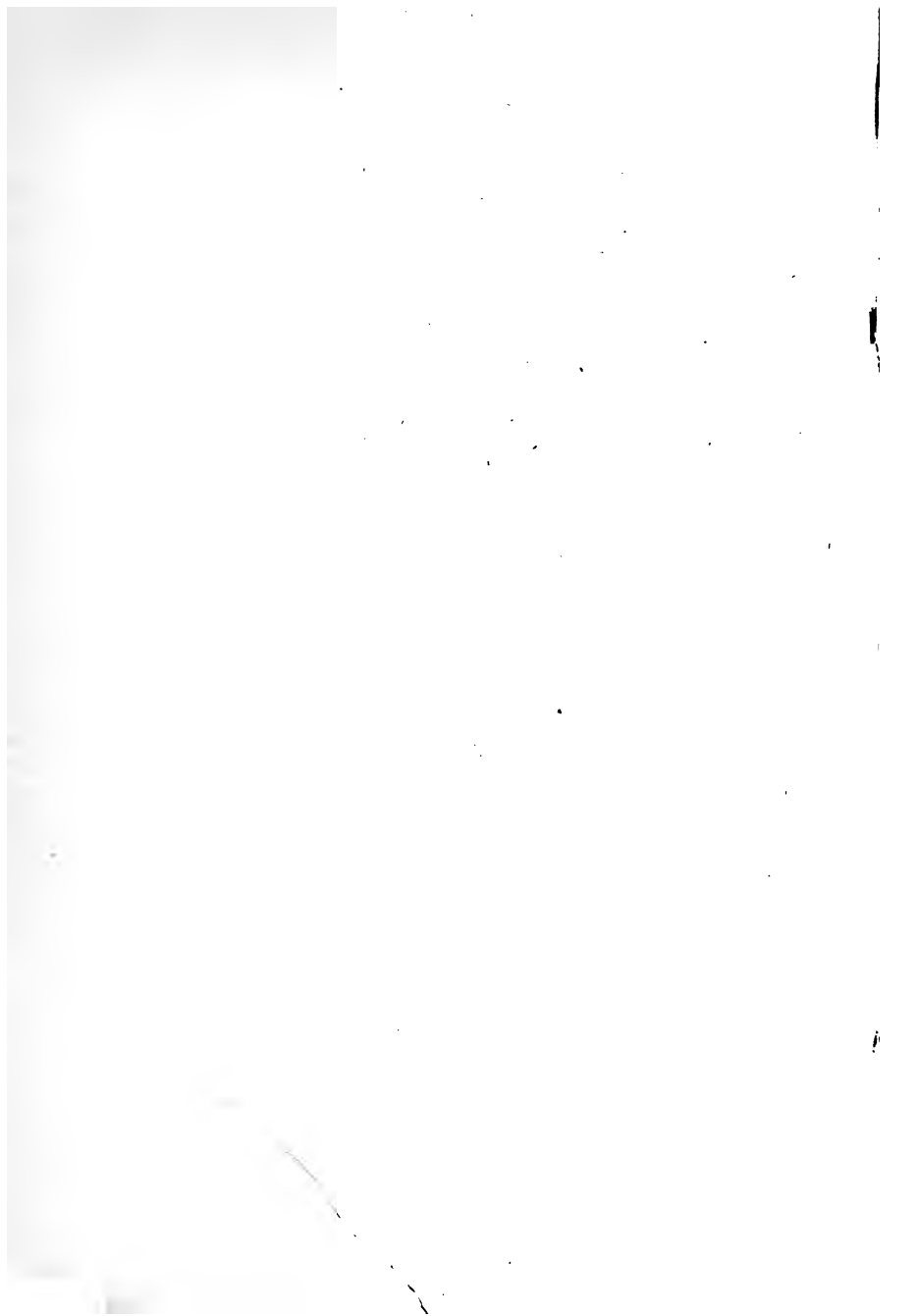
III.

ORM'S AWAKENING.

I awoke.

And rising,
My Soul look'd forth—
'Twas the dewy darkness,
And the Veil was glittering
Over the earth ;
But afar off eastward
The Dawn was glimmering,
All silver pale,
And slowly fading
With a mystic tremor,
The Lights gleam'd beautiful
In the wondrous Veil.
Yea, Dawn came cheerly,
And the hill-tops brighten'd,

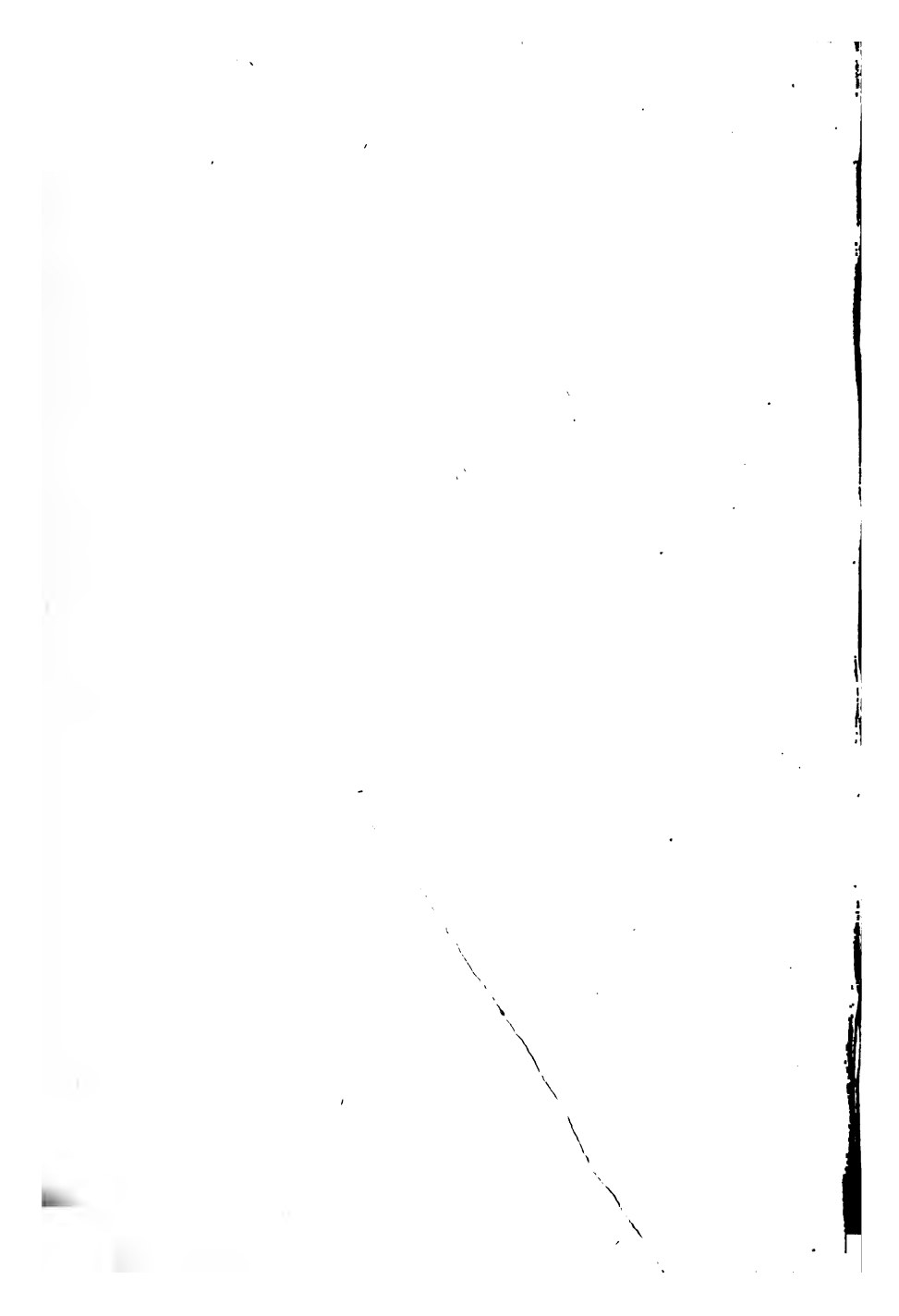
And the shepherds shouted,
 And a trumpet blew,
And the misty Ocean
Caught silver tremors,
With the brown-sail'd fish-boats
 Glimmering thro'—
And the City murmur'd
As I ran unto it,
And my heart was merry,
 And my fears were few ;
And singing gaily
The lark rose upward,
Its brown wings gleaming
 With the morning dew !



VII.

CORUISKEN SONNETS.

*Late in the gloaming of the year,
Orm haunts the melancholy Mere,
A phantom he, where phantoms brood,
In that soul-searching solitude.
To the cold Spirit far away
He prayeth, all an autumn day.*



VII.
CORUISKEN SONNETS.

I.

LORD, IS IT THOU?

LORD, is it Thou? God, do I touch indeed

Thy raiment hem, that melts like vapour dark?

O homeless Spirit, that fleest us in our need,

Pause! answer! while I kneel, remain and mark. . .

Father! . . Ere back they bear me, cold and stark,
Across Thy darken'd threshold,—ere I plead

For love no longer, pity me, and heark!

Surviving the long tale of craft and creed,

The gaunt Hills gather round me, dumb and grey,—

The Waters utter their monotonous moan,—

The immemorial Heavens, with no groan,

Bent sweet eyes down, as on their natal day:

Cold are all these as clay, and still as stone;

But *I* have found a voice, and I will pray.

II.

WE ARE FATHERLESS.

I found Thee not by the starved widow's bed,
Nor in the sick-rooms where my dear ones died ;
In Cities vast I hearken'd for Thy tread,
And heard a thousand call Thee, wretched-eyed,
Worn out, and bitter. But the Heavens denied
Their melancholy Maker. From the Dead
Assurance came, nor answer. Then I fled
Into these wastes, and raised my hands, and cried :
" The seasons pass—the sky is as a pall—
Thin wasted hands on withering hearts we press—
There is no God—in vain we plead and call,
In vain with weary eyes we search and guess—
Like children in an empty house sit all,
Cast-away children, lorn and fatherless."

III.

WE ARE CHILDREN.

Children indeed are we—children that wait
Within a wondrous dwelling, while on high
Stretch the sad vapours and the homeless sky ;
The House is fair, yet all is desolate
Because our Father comes not ; clouds of fate
Sadden above us—shivering we hear
The passing rain, the wind that shakes the gate,
And cry to one another “ He is near ! ”
At early morning, with a shining Face,
He left us innocent and lily-crown'd ;
And now 'tis late—night cometh on apace—
We hold each other's hands and look around,
Frighted at our own shades ! Heaven send us grace !
When He returns, all will be sleeping sound.

IV.

WHEN WE ARE ALL ASLEEP.

When He returns, and finds all sleeping here—

Some old, some young, some fair, and some not fair,
Will He stoop down and whisper in each ear

“Awaken!” or for pity’s sake forbear,—

Saying, “How shall I meet their frozen stare
Of wonder, and their eyes so woebegone?

How shall I comfort them in their despair,
If they cry out ‘too late! let us sleep on?’”

Perchance He will not wake us up, but when

He sees us look so happy in our rest,
Will murmur, “Poor dead women and dead men!

Dire was their doom, and weary was their quest.
Wherefore awake them unto life again?

Let them sleep on untroubled—it is best.”

V.

BUT THE HILLS WILL BEAR WITNESS.

But ye,—ye Hills that gather round this day,
Ye Mountains, and ye Vapours, and ye Waves,
Ye will attest the wrongs of men of clay,
When, in a World all hush'd, sits on our graves
The melancholy Maker. From your caves
Strange echoes of our old lost life shall come ;
With still eyes fixed on your vast architraves,
Nature shall speak, tho' mortal lips be dumb.
Then God will cry : " Sadly the Waters fall,
Sadly the Mountains keep their snowy state,
The Clouds pass on, the Winds and Echoes call,
The World is sweet, yet wearily I wait.
Tho' all is fair, and I am Lord of all,
Without my Children I am desolate."

VI.

DESOLATE !

Desolate ! How the Peaks of ashen grey,
The smoky Mists that drift from hill to hill,
The Waters dark, anticipate this day
That sullen desolation. O how still
The shadows come and vanish, with no will !
How still the melancholy Waters lie
How still the vapours of the under-sky
Mirror'd below, drift onward, and fulfil
Thy mandate as they mingle !—Not a sound,
Save that deep murmur of a torrent near,
Deepening silence. Hush ! the dark profound
Groans, as some grey crag loosens and falls sheer
To the abyss. Wildly I look around.
O Spirit of the Human, art Thou *here* ?

VII.

LORD, ART THOU HERE?

Lord, art Thou here? far from the busy crowd,
Brooding in melancholy solitude;
Darkening Thy visage with a thunder-cloud,
Holding Thy breath, if mortal foot intrude.
Father, how shall I meet Thee in this mood?
How shall I ask Thee why Thou dwell'st with stones,
While far away the world, like Lazarus, groans,
Sick for Thy healing. Father, if Thou be'st good,
And wise, and gentle, O come down, come down! —
Come like an Angel with a human face,
Pass thro' the gates into the hungry Town,
Comfort the weary, send the afflicted grace,
Shine brighter on the Graves where we lay down.
Our dear ones, cheer them in the narrow place!

VIII.

GOD IS BEAUTIFUL.

O Thou art beautiful ! and Thou dost bestow
Thy beauty on this stillness—still as sheep
The Hills lie under Thee ; the Waters deep
Murmur for joy of Thee ; the voids below
Mirror Thy strange fair Vapours as they flow ;
And now, afar upon the ashen height,
Thou sendest down a radiant look of light,
So that the still Peaks glisten, and a glow
Rose-colour'd tints the little snowy cloud
That poises on the highest peak of all.
O Thou art beautiful !—the Hills are bowed
Beneath Thee ; on Thy name the soft Winds call—
The monstrous Ocean trumpets it aloud,
The Rains and Snows intone it as they fall.

IX.

THE MOTION OF THE MISTS.

Here by the sunless Lake there is no air,
Yet with how ceaseless motion, with how strange
Flowing and fading, do the high Mists range
The gloomy gorges of the Mountains bare.
Some weary breathing never ceases there,—
The ashen peaks can feel it hour by hour ;
The purple depths are darken'd by its power ;
A soundless breath, a trouble all things share.
That feel it come and go. See ! onward swim
The ghostly Mists, from silent land to land,
From gulf to gulf ; now the whole air grows dim—
Like living men, darkling a space, they stand.
But lo ! a Sunbeam, like a Cherubim,
Scatters them onward with a flaming brand.

X.

CORUIK.

I think this is the very stillest place

On all God's earth, and yet no rest is here.

The Vapours mirror'd in the black loch's face

Drift on like frantic shapes and disappear;

A never-ceasing murmur in mine ear

Tells me of Waters wild that flow and flow.

There is no rest at all afar or near,

Only a sense of things that moan and go.

And lo! the still small life these limbs contain

I feel flows on like those, restless and proud;

Before that breathing nought within my brain

Pauses, but all drifts on like mist and cloud;

Only the bald Peaks and the Stones remain,

Frozen before Thee, desolate and bowed.

XI.

BUT WHITHER?

And whither, O ye Vapours ! do ye wend ?

Stirred by that weary breathing, whither away ?

And whither, O ye Dreams ! that night and day
Drift o'er the troublous life, tremble, and blend
To broken lineaments of that far Friend,

Whose strange breath's come and go ye feel so deep ?

O Soul ! that hast no rest, and seekest sleep,
Whither ? and will thy wanderings ever end ?

All things that be are full of a quick pain ;

Onward we fleet, swift as the running rill,—
The vapours drift, the mists within the brain
Float on obscuringly and have no will.

Only the bare Peaks and the Stones remain ;

These only,—and a God sublime and still.

XII.

GOD IS PITILESS.

O Thou art pitiless ! They call Thee Light,
Law, Justice, Love ; but Thou art pitiless.
What thing of earth is precious in Thy sight,
But weary waiting on and soul's distress ?
When dost Thou come with glorious hands to bless
The good man that dies cold for lack of Thee ?
When bring'st Thou garlands for our happiness ?
Whom dost Thou send but Death to set us free ?
Blood runs like wine—foul spirits sit and rule—
The weak are crushed in every street and lane—
He who is generous becomes the fool
Of all the world, and gives his life in vain.
Wert Thou as good as Thou art beautiful,
Thou couldst not bear to look upon such pain.

XIII.

YEA, PITILESS.

Yea, Thou art pitiless—Thou dost permit
The Priest to use Thee as a hangman's cord—
Thou proppest up the Layman's shallow wit,
Driving the Beggar from the laden board,
Thou art the easy text of those who hoard
Their gifts in secret chests for Death to see.

"Mighty and strong and glorious is the Lord!"
The Prophet cries, gone mad for lack of Thee;
While good men dying deem thy grace a dream,
While sick men wail for Thee and mad blaspheme,

A thousand forms of Thee the foolish preach—
Fair stretch Thy temples over all the lands,
In each of these some barbarous Image stands,
And men grow atheists in the shrine of each.

XIV.

COULD GOD BE JUDGED !

Can I be calm, beholding everywhere

Disease and Anguish busy, early and late ?

Can I be silent, nor compassionate

The evils that both Soul and Body bear ?

O what have sickly Children done, to share

Thy cup of sorrows ? yet their dull, sad pain

Makes the earth awful ;—on the tomb's dark stair

Moan Idiots, with no glimmer in the brain.

No shrill Priest with his hangman's cord can beat

Thy mercy into these—ah nay, ah nay !

The Angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street

Are Hunger and Distortion and Decay.

Lord ! that mad'st Man, and send'st him foes so fleet,

Who shall judge *Thee* upon Thy judgment-day ?

XV.

THE HILLS ON THEIR THRONES.

Ghostly and livid, robed with shadow, see !

Each mighty Mountain silent on its throne,

From foot to scalp one stretch of livid stone,

Without one gleam of grass or greenery.

Silent they take the immutable decree—

Darkness or sunlight come,—they do not stir ;

Each bare brow lifted desolately free,

Keepeth the silence of a death-chamber.

Silent they watch each other until doom ;

They see each other's phantoms come and go,

Yet stir not. Now the stormy hour brings gloom,

Now all things grow confused and black below,

Specific through the cloudy Drift they loom,

And each accepts his individual woe.

XVI.

KING BLAABHEIN.

Monarch of these is Blaabhein. On his height
The lightning and the snow sleep side by side,
Like snake and lamb ; he broodeth in a white
And wintry consecration. All his pride
Is husht this dimly-gleaming autumn day—
He thinketh of the things he hath beheld—
Beneath his feet the Rains crawl still and grey,
Like phantoms of the mighty men of eld ;
A quiet awe the dreadful heights doth fill,
The high clouds pause and brood above their King ;
The torrent murmurs gently as a rill ;
Softly and low the winds are murmuring ;
A small black speck above the snow, how still
Hovers the Eagle, with no stir of wing !

XVII.

BLAABHEIN IN THE MISTS.

Watch but a moment—all is changed ! A moan
Breaketh the beauty of that noonday dream ;
The hoary Titan darkens on his throne,
And with an indistinct and senile scream
Gazes at the wild Rains as past they stream,
Thro' vaporous air wild-blowing on his brow ;
All black, from scalp to base there is no gleam, .
Even his silent snows are faded now.
Watch yet !—and yet !—Behold, and all is done—
'Twas but the shallow shapes that come and go,
Troubling the mimic picture in the eye.
Still and untroubled sits the kingly one.
Yonder the Eagle floats—there sleeps the Snow
Against the pale green of the cloudless sky.

XVIII.

THE FIERY BIRTH OF THE HILLS.

O hoary Hills, tho' ye look aged, ye
Are but the children of a latter time—
Methinks I see ye in that hour sublime
When from the hissing cauldron of the Sea
Ye were upheaven, while so terribly
The Clouds boiled, and the Lightning scorched ye
bare.
Wild, new-born, blind, Titans in agony,
Ye glared at heaven through folds of fiery hair! . . .
Then, in an instant, while ye trembled thus
A Hand from heaven, white and luminous,
Pass'd o'er your brows, and husht your fiery breath.
Lo! one by one the still Stars gather'd round,
The great Deep glass'd itself, and with no sound
A cold Snow glimmering fell, and all was still as
death.

XIX.

THE CHANGELESS HILLS.

All power, all virtue, is repression—ye
Are stationary, and God keeps ye great ;
Around your heads the fretful winds play free ;
Ye change not—ye are calm and desolate.
What seems to us a trouble and a fate,
Is but the loose fog streaming from your feet
And drifting onward—early ye sit and late,
While unseen Winds waft past the things that fleet.
So sit for ever, still and passionless
As He that made ye—thought and soul's distress
Ye know not, though ye contemplate the strife ;
Better to share the Spirit's bitterest aches—
Better to be the weakest Wave that breaks
On a wild Ocean of mysterious Life.

XX.

O MOUNTAIN PEAK OF A GOD.

Father, if Thou imperturbable art,
Passive as these, lords of a lonely land—
If, having laboured, Thou must sit apart—
If having once open'd the void, and planned
This tragedy, Thou must impassive stand
Spectator of the scenic flow of things,
Then I—a drop of dew, a grain of sand—
Pity Thy lot, poor palsied King of Kings.
Better to fail and fail, to shriek and shriek,
Better to break, like any Wave, and go,—
Impotent godhead, let Thy slave be weak !—
Yea, do not freeze my Soul, but let it flow—
O wherefore call to Thee, a mountain Peak
Impassive, beautiful, serene with snow ?

XXI.

GOD THE IMAGE.

Impassive, beautiful, and desolate,

Is this the Lord my God, whom I entreat?

Powerless to stay the ravages of fate—

Jove with his right hand palsied, Jove effete,

Fetter'd by frost upon a stony seat—

O dreadful apparition! Can this be?

Yonder He looms, where never a heart doth beat,
In the cold ether of theology.

Come down! come down! O Souls that wander there!

Cold are the snows, chill is the dreadful air—

Come down! come down into the Valleys deep;
Leave the wild Image to the stars, that rise
Around about it with affrighted eyes;

Come to green under-glooms, and sink, and sleep.

XXII.

THE FOOTPRINTS.

Come to green under-glooms,—and in your hair
Weave nightshade, foxglove red, and rank wolfsbane,
And slumber and forget Him ; if in vain
Ye try to slumber off your sorrow there,
Arise once more and openly repair
To busy haunts where men and women sigh,
And if all things but echo back your care,
Cry out aloud, “ There is no God ! ” and die.
But if upon a day when all is dark,
Thou, stooping in the public ways, shalt mark
Strange luminous footprints as of feet that shine—
Follow them ! follow them ! O soul bereaven !
God had a Son—He hath pass’d that way to heaven ;
Follow, and look upon the Face divine !

XXIII.

WE ARE DEATHLESS.

Yet hear me, Mountains ! echo me, O Sea !

Murmur an answer, Winds, from out your caves ;

Cry loudly, Torrents, Mountains, Winds, and
Waves—

Hark to my crying all, and echo me—

All things that live are deathless—I and ye.

The Father could not slay us if he would ;

The elements in all their multitude

Will rise against their Master terribly,

If but one hair upon a human head

Should perish ! . . . Darkness grows on crag and
steep,

A hollow thunder fills the torrent's bed ;

The wild Mists moan and threaten as they creep ;

And hush ! now, when all other cries are fled,

The warning murmur of the white-hair'd Deep.

XXIV.

A VOICE IN THE WHIRLWIND.

I heard a Whirlwind on the mountain peak
Pause for a space its furious flight and cry—
“There is no Death!” loudly it seemed to shriek ;
“Nothing that is, beneath the sun, shall die.”
The frail sick Vapours echoed, drifting by—
“There is no Death, but change early and late ;
Powerless were God’s right Hand full arm’d with fate,
To slay the meanest thing beneath the sky.”
Yea, even as tremulous foam-bells on the sea,
Coming and going, are all things of breath ;
But evermore, deathless, and bright, and free,
We re-emerge, in spite of Change or Death.
Hearken, O Mountains ! Waters, echo me !
O wild Wind, echo what the Man-Wind saith !

XXV.

CRY OF THE LITTLE BROOK.

Christ help me ! whither would my dark thoughts run !

I look around me, trembling fearfully ;

The dreadful silence of the Silent One

Freezes my lips, and all is sad to see.

Hark ! hark ! what small voice murmurs " God
made *me* ! "

It is the Brooklet, singing all alone,

Sparkling with pleasure that is all its own,

And running, self-contented, sweet, and free.

O Brooklet, born where never grass is green,

Finding the stony hill and flowing fleet,

Thou comest as a Messenger serene,

With shining wings and silver-sandal'd feet ;

Faint falls thy music on a Soul unclean,

And, in a moment, all the World looks sweet !

XXVI.

THE HAPPY HEARTS OF EARTH.

Whence thou hast come, thou knowest not, little
Brook,

Nor whither thou art bound. Yet wild and gay,
Pleased in thyself, and pleasing all that look,
Thou wendest, all the seasons, on thy way ;
The lonely glen grows gladsome with thy play,
Thou glidest lamb-like thro' the ghostly shade ;
To think of solemn things thou wast not made,
But to sing on, for pleasure, night and day.
Such happy hearts are wandering, crystal clear,
In the great world where men and women dwell ;
Earth's mighty shows they neither love nor fear,
They are content to be, while I rebel,
Out of their own delight dispensing cheer,
And ever softly whispering, " All is well ! "

XXVII.

FATHER, FORGIVE THY CHILD.

O sing, clear Brook, sing on, while in a dream
I feel the sweetness of the years go by !
The crags and peaks are softened now, and seem
Gently to sleep against the gentle sky ;
Old scenes and faces glimmer up and die,
With outlines of sweet thought obscured too long ;
Like boys that shout at play far voices cry ;
O sing ! for I am weeping at the song.
I know not what I am, but only know
I have had glimpses tongue may never speak ;
No more I balance human joy and woe,
But think of my transgressions, and am meek.
Father ! forgive the child who fretted so,—
His proud heart yields,—the tears are on his cheek !

XXVIII.

GOD'S LONELINESS.

When, in my strong affection, I have sought
To play at Providence with men of clay,
How hath my good come constantly to nought,
How hath my light and love been cast away,—
How hath my light been light to lead astray,
How hath my love become of sorry worth,
How feeble hath been all my soul's essay
To aid one single man on all God's earth !
Father in Heaven, when I think these things,
Helpless Thou seemest to redeem our plight—
Thy lamp shines on shut eyes—each Spirit springs
To its own stature still in Thy despite—
While haggard Nature round Thy footstool clings,
Pale, powerless, sitt'st Thou, in a Lonely Light.

XXIX.

THE CUP OF TEARS.

My God ! my God ! with passionate appeal,
Pardon I crave for these mad moods of mine,—
Can I remember, with no heart to feel,
The gift of Thy dear Son, the Man Divine—
My God ! what agonies of love were Thine,
Sitting alone, forgotten, on Thy height,
Pale, powerless, awful in that Lonely Light,
While 'neath Thy feet the cloudy hyaline
Rain'd blood upon the darkness,—where Thine Own
Held the black Cup of all earth's tears, and cried !
Ev'n then, tho' Thou wert conscious of his groan,
Pale in that Lonely Light Thou didst abide,
Nor dared, even then, tho' shaken on Thy throne,
To reach Thy hand and dash the Cup aside.

XXX.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

On the dark waters of man's thought still gleams
Softly and silvernly, from night to night,
That starlike Legend, whose fair substance seems
Consuming in the melancholy light
It sheddeth. Father, do I see aright?
Is it a truth or most divine of dreams?
That He, Thy Child, walk'd once in raiment white
With mortal men, and mused by Syrian streams?
O Life that puts our noblest life to shame,
Was it a Star, or light to lead astray?
Thought's waves grow husht beneath that silvern flame,
Our hopes pursue it and our doubts obey;
And whether truth or phantom, it became
The sweetest sphere that lights the World's black
way.

XXXI.

EARTH'S ELDEST BORN.

But He, the only One of mortal birth
Who raised the Veil and saw the Face behind,
While yet He wander'd footsore on the earth,
Beheld His Father's Eyes,—that they were kind ;
Here in the dark I grope, confused, purblind,
I have not seen the glory and the peace,
But on the darken'd mirror of the mind
Strange glimmers fall, and shake me till they cease—
Then, wondering, dazzled, on Thy name I call,
And, like a child, reach empty hands and moan,
And broken accents from my wild lips fall,
And I implore Thee in this human tone ;—
If such as I can follow Him at all
Into Thy presence, 'tis by love alone.

XXXII.

WHAT SPIRIT COMETH ?

Who cometh wandering hither in my need ?

What gentle Ghost from Heaven cometh now ? —

Oh, I am broken to, the rod indeed—

Father, my earthly father, is it thou ?

The stooping shape with piteous human brow,

The dear quaint gesture and the feeble pace,

The weary-eyed, world-worn, belovèd face,

Ev'n as they wildly faded, meet me now.

A gentle voice flows softly, saying plain :

“From death comes light, from pain beatitude ;

Chide not at loss, for out of loss comes gain ;

Chide not at grief, for 'tis the Soul's best food—

Out of my death-chamber, out of wrong and pain,

Cometh a life and odour. God is good.”

XXXIII.

STAY, O SPIRIT !

Father, my earthly father, stay, O stay !

I know thou wert a man as others be ;

Sore were thy feet upon the World's cold clay,

And thou didst stumble oft, and on thy knee

Knelt little ; but thy gentle heart gleamed free

In cloud and shadow, giving its best cheer ;

Thou had'st an open hand, and laugh'd for glee

When happy men or creatures dumb played near ;

But in thy latter years God's scourge was sore

Upon thee—weary were thy wrongs and dire,—

Yet blessings on thee—until all was o'er,

Cheery thou wert beside a cheerless fire—

Till one red dawn the mark was on the door,

And thou wert dead to all the world's desire.

XXXIV.

QUIET WATERS.

O Rainbow, Rainbow, on the livid height,
Softening its ashen outlines into dream,
Dewy yet brilliant, delicately bright
As pink wild-roses' leaves, why dost thou gleam
So beckoningly? Whom dost thou invite
Still higher upward on the bitter quest?
What dost thou promise to the weary sight
In that strange region whence thou issuest?
Speakest thou of pensive runlets by whose side
Our dear ones wander sweet and gentle-eyed,
In the soft dawn of a diviner Day?
Art thou a promise? Come those hues and dyes
From heavenly Meads, near which thou dost arise,
Iris'd from Quiet Waters, far away!

VIII.

THE CORUISKEN VISION ;

Or, the Legend of the Book.

*A phantom still, where phantoms brood,
In that soul-searching solitude,
Orm read and pondered, line by line,
The Legend of the Book Divine.—
Like to a tree above a brook,
His Spirit bent above the Book,
And shapes and faces in the stream
Went drifting by him dark with dream—
But ever as they blacken'd by
Came mirrored gleams of the blue sky . . .
Till, sooth'd to sleep by sound and sight,
Orm had a vision of the night,
Wherein, with wild eyes upward bent,
The Book's dark Spirit came and went.*



VIII.

THE CORUISKEN VISION ;

Or, the Legend of the Book.

The shore of the Lake of Coruisk. A starry night.

ORM.

CALM sleeps the lonely Water of the Waste,
The gentle going of a windy day
Hath left it quiet, and the dim-eyed Moon,
Whose phantom ploughs the silent gulfs beneath,
Misteth its sable mirror, where the Stars
Float moistly, fitfully, like drops of dew.

O Book Divine ! I close thy leaves this night,
And having drunken deep a blessed draught,
Thirst still as ere I drank. Blank is the page ;

Of stature huger than a mortal's. Speak !
Art thou a spirit or a man ?

SPIRIT.

I am

The Shadow of the Spirit of the Book,—
The Angel of all Evil.

ORM.

Fly me not !

If thou be *that*, let me contemplate thee.
How does the white smile of the ghostly Moon
Silver thy wrinkled cheeks and solemn beard !
There is a sweetness as of solemn thoughts
In thy calm face, and in thine eyes the peace
Which passeth understanding.

SPIRIT.

Look again !

ORM.

Thy thin brow shrivels to the scalp ! Thy cheek
Shrinks like an adder's skin, and leaves thine eyes
Two spots of flaming emerald ! Thy hair
Melts off like snow ! Thy spotted flesh curls round
The forked tongue that shoots from slimy lips !
Aye, now I know thee, yet I fear thee not !
Calm as a stone, I on mine elbow lean
And look at thee with such a scorn as thou,
In the remote abysms of the past,
Turned on the heel that bruised thee !

SPIRIT.

Yet again !

ORM.

O speak ! Thy face grows glorious with the ray
Of some old prophecy ; thy form dilates ;
Around thee is a motion as of wings ;
Thy lifted arm points at the Stars which dim

Bright orbs upon thee,—Heaven with all her eyes
Watching her eldest born !

SPIRIT.

Almighty God !

Father ! How long, how long ? . . Nay, He is dumb
Upon His throne. He answers not, but mocks me
With the mild motion of those ministries
That work His nightly law. But thou hast heard ;
Thou knowest me now.

ORM.

I know thee !

SPIRIT.

And thy cheek

Blanches not ?

ORM.

Nay, by pride, and by despair.

I fear thee not—we are too much akin.

I would hear more of thee,—and much of those
Who ate and perished.

SPIRIT.

That which men call knowing
Shall speedily be heaped on thine head ;
Nor scorn me, if to-night I dwarf the truth
Into a picture for thy little eye.—
Hither, ye wandering Spirits, and attend !

VOICES.

Down where the moonlight lies
On beds of sable sand,
We come and we go at thy bidding !
Never, never more
Foot hath trod this darkness,
Never, never more
Mortal hath descended !

The secret of Time, yea the Book of the World,
Under the waters abideth ;
The thin wave creeps chill thro' its brazen leaves,
That stir with a moaning pulsation !

SPIRIT.

Ye hear me, homeless voices of the Dead !
Upbuild ! and be the Temple broad and high !

VOICES.

Rocks from the mammoth world,
Spars from the sifted sands,
Bones that whiten decaying,—
With the blood of man
These we mould together ;
Fire with slippery hands
Clings around the columns :
Thrones for the Wise who have sought for the Book
That under the waters abideth,
The red fire of Hell to illumine the whole,
And the Temple is built at thy bidding !

ORM.

The air is nighted with an Edifice
That whirls on serpent columns heavenward,
Growing and growing, like a living thing
At its own will, with rustling as of wings.
Both lake and sky are hidden—all is dark !
The fabric pauses in its upward growth ;
And lo ! before me swings a fiery Gate,
Upon whose threshold sits a little Child,
Turning the dim leaves of a brazen Book
With fingers light as are a rose's leaves,
And smiling on the things it sees therein.

SPIRIT.

Ye who have eaten and perish'd, at your thrones !

VOICES WITHIN THE TEMPLE.

Out of our dust a Flower
Hath grown with sap of blood,
And the little one plucks it freely ;

In a young bride's hair
Is it brightly glowing !
Upon dying lips
Doth it mildly blossom !
While upon our thrones,
Not by hands upbuilded,
We, the Kings of Thought,
Sit in meditation.

SPIRIT.

Pass in !

ORM.

How sweetly sits the little Child,
Making a radiance round him with his smile,
So that the dark Book sparkles under him ;
One sweet white blossom of the lily gleams
In the deep golden of his hair. His name ?
Who is he ?

SPIRIT.

Beäl. Born, but not of woman,
He ages not, but solves all mysteries

By the sweet light which, burning like a lamp,
His vestal Soul gives forth thro' eyes divine
But comprehends not.

ORM.

Is immortal?

SPIRIT.

Yea!

Because he hath not eaten of the Tree
Of Sorrow. He was sitting on Eve's shoulder,
Babbling fine fancies with his baby-lips,
And breathing balm into her rosy ear,
When the Temptation found her. . . . Enter in !

[They enter.]

ORM.

It is a sight to wither up the heart,
And burst the straining eyeball of the soul.—
Shadows, they sit within a shadow-realm,
Below their feet a gulf, and overhead
The fretted roof glitters with stars that light not

The air around them, tho' self-luminous.
Up to the roofs the quivering columns writhe
Snake-like ; and in the interstice of gloom
The Shadows reign, white-hair'd and hollow-eyed,
Each crowned and sceptred, each with gaze bent
inward,
So that they look not on the frozen woe
Of one another's faces, nor perceive
All is so black around about their seats.
What shapes are these ?

SPIRIT.

The Kings of Thought.

ORM.

The Kings

Of Thought . . . and I conceive them not!

SPIRIT.

They are,
And are not, what they seem ; for Thought is twofold :

The flower that bends above its shape in water,
Conception and its shadow. These are false,
Yet are they all projected by the truth ;
Without the truth they are not.

ORM.

Kings of Thought ?

Things that have eaten the fruit and perished ?
These surely should be those that know,—can speak
Of this unrest which flames my Spirit on !

SPIRIT.

These are their shades ; their spirits dwell afar,
Drinking the dew of a serener air.
In aspiration and in glorious dream,
They learnt too well that all is vanity.

ORM.

Thought is immortal—is a winged thing !
A homeless ecstasy that cannot die !
Or be confined, or wholly pass away !

SPIRIT.

Thought, tho' immortal, if it beat the air
With insolent wing, must fail, as these have done.
He made His earth and heavens, His clear air,
His elements, His seasons, all things fair
Or terrible, all wondrous elements
That flash and fade around man's prison-house,
To be a testimony unto Him ;
Many have failed and perished at that point
Where testimony so amazes mind,
That it obscures the glory testified.

ORM.

What shape is that ?—he with the sombre robe
Hideously blazoned ?

SPIRIT.

The son of Brahm,
Menu, a mighty mortal of the East,
Who grew so wise they took him for a god,
And fixed him just beneath their Trinity.

ORM.

He, further down the gloom, with glorious face
Gleaming like daybreak, snakes around his neck,
And stars amid his hair?

SPIRIT.

'Tis Orpheus :

Who, with deep-gleaming eyes and singing lips,
From mystic circle unto circle swept
That lessen inward to the Soul of All,
And, having swept each circle's course divine,
Naming the wondrous habitants therein,
Whirl'd, like a moth around an Altar Lamp,
A moment round that inmost Flame of All,
Then fluttering fell to Lesbos, blind with light.
Close to his side the long-hair'd Samian sits,
First Shepherd of the gentle and the wise,
Drinking sad day from the still lustrous gaze
Of his surpassing neighbour. . . . And that other,
He with the subtle smile and thin white hair,

Holding the goblet up to lips of ice,
Is Socrates, a Greek of homelier growth ;
Who nearer earth tasted forbidden fruit,
And ended meekly with a hemlock cup :
Yet, tasting thus the bitterness of wisdom,
Smiled gloriously, and so passed up to God,
Wise in his dying. At his feet behold,
With small eyes glimmering thro' hair unkempt,
Diogenes, who stole the wondrous fruit,
And munched it in the mud, and scowled on all
Because it tasted sourly. He who towers
Amid a mystic circle of the Wise,
Who turn unto him great eyes dim with dream,—
He with the beautiful great brow, and hair
Where gleams of gold still linger in the grey—
Plato—of all who ever lived and died,
The one who loved the quest for its own sake,
Because it led him into paths so fair ;
Married his days and nights to thought, and left
Broods of angelic dreams attesting all

That by the unassisted mind of man
Could be conceived of immortality ;
Saw Truth in open daylight face to face,
And would have loved and understood her too,
Had he not thought Knowledge so beautiful.

ORM.

These are but heathen prophets !

SPIRIT.

Even so—

Pass on. Mark yonder Figure standing crowned,
A sword upon his thigh, and near his breast
A harp of burning gold. His dexter hand
Clutches the sword, and the impetuous blood
Seems black'ning to the nails ; but his blue eyes
Look downward on a phantom in the gulf—
A pale Youth swinging by the hair of gold
To the black branches of a forest tree.

ORM.

'Tis the lost King of Israël !

SPIRIT.

Speak to him !

Thy voice will stir him, tho' he sees thee not.

ORM.

Speak, Shade of Israël ! . . .

Across his face

There flits a gleam like starlight upon snow :

He stirs, and flings his arms around his harp.

SPIRIT OF DAVID.

I was a burning and a shining Light,

Yet I projected darkness wheresoe'er

I wandered crown'd. I slew, and slaying prayed.

Like to a storm of music I swept on,

Sounding the trumpet of an angry Lord ;

But lastly, in the darkness knelt I down,

And wept above my gold-haired Absalom,
And touched my harp, and sighing fell to sleep,
With downward drooping head and ruinous hair,
And fingers feeling blindly for the sword ;
But swooning, smote the harp-strings unaware,
And like a strain of peaceful sound, my Soul
Slipt thro' my fingers out upon the strings,
There linger'd faintly many nights and days,
And in sad cadence glided up to God.

ORM.

Enough ! I sicken when I gaze upon him—
He darken'd that he sought, the Light Divine.
No further. Yonder in their dark array
I see the black-brow'd builders of the Law ;
At whose dark footstools, moveless in the gloom,
The pallid Prophets crouch with fiery eyes.

A VOICE.

God spake a Word that pass'd along like wind,
Through the abysses and the gulfs of Time,—

A voice of lamentation mix'd with hope,
And a deep under-hum of mystery :
One prophet darkening as a thunder-cloud,
Utter'd this promise in a lightning flash !
Another murmur'd it to his own heart,
Till the wild thing grew mild and musical !
Age after age, in crime and loss and woe,
This Word hath echoed like a wondrous voice,
Coming on peaceful men among their flocks,
Startling the warrior, while, in battle-field,
He, listening, looks upon his bloody hands !

VOICES.

Out of our dust a Flower
Hath grown with sap of blood,
And the little one plucks it freely !
Vainly the mind of man
Sits in meditation,
Vainly the mighty seek,
Thought is weak to fathom :

The Secret of Time, yea the Book of the World,
Under the waters abideth,
We search'd for the same from birth to the grave,
And wearily westering perished !

ORM.

O see ! before us sits the radiant Child
We passed upon the threshold. Still he smiles,
Turning the dim leaves of the brazen Book,
And shining on the things he sees therein.

SPIRIT.

Peep over his shoulder. See to what the small
White hand is pointing.

ORM.

*" Verily I say,
Except a man be born again, he shall not
Enter the kingdom of God !"*

How quietly

The Little One looks in my face and smiles,
And while I gaze upon him, on my Soul
Truths drop like flakes of snow, melting away
Ere thought can seize them. Speak, O Radiant One !

SPIRIT.

He only clasps his little hands and smiles ;
Bend to him thus : yea, he who seeks to find
Wisdom in little ones must stoop to them.
Is silent ! but he shuts the brazen Book,
And puts his rosy arms around my neck.

VOICES.

The smile of a little Child
Disturbs us where we sit
On our thrones—the Wise and the Mighty !
Never heretofore
Have our Thrones been shaken,
Never heretofore
Did we know and wonder !

We are, and we are not ; we know, and we know not ;

We come and we go at thy bidding ;

We have followed each other from birth to the grave,

And wearily westering perish'd.

[The Child kisses Satan. The Temple vanishes.]

• ORM.

. . . Gone ! melted like a vapour ! and again

The cold white starlight on the lonely Mere !

A dream ; yet still the radiant Infant's kiss

Burns on thy forehead as a seal of fire !

Almighty God ! Master !

SPIRIT.

What dost thou see ?

ORM.

The gathering clouds above assume strange shapes,

And struggle onward to the sunken sun,

Piloted by a swift and audible wind ;

The waters glass themselves below, and mirror

The phantasm as it passes ; and the moon

Burns inward thro' blue ether, whirling round,
Rolling her round white eye on all, and casting
Wild shafts of silver on the lake. Black forms,
Gigantic up above, human below,
Swim on with waving arms and flashing faces,
Up, up, as if they climb a hill and pass :
Lo, one on horseback pointeth with his sword
And urgeth on. Men, women, children follow :
The light illumines the golden hair of a child
Held in its mother's arms ; and now, O God !
Hide me !

SPIRIT.

Behold !

ORM.

The shadow of a Cross
Looms huge and forked in the lake : 'tis borne
By One with stooping shoulders, waving hair ;
Behind Him followeth a motley crowd ;
He pauseth underneath His load—He halts—

His face is silvered by the plunging moon—
Almighty Lord, it is the Nazarene !
O God ! two silent Faces, each the Christ's,
One from the heaven, one from the black lake,
Gaze on me, and the wild Moon gleams on both !

SPIRIT.

Look up, look up !

ORM.

Oh, I am blind !

SPIRIT.

Thou fearest

To look upon the thing thou hast denied.

ORM.

Is it a fable ?

SPIRIT.

Yea ;—if men and women,
And all they think, and all they feel and see,

Are fables. 'Twas the shadow of thy thought
Crossing the luminous silence of His stars,
Darkening His air, blanching His fiery moon,
Using His water for a mirror. Rise !
The thing hath faded from His elements
Into the subtle chambers of thy brain,
Where all live mingled. Let it work therein !
Yonder the dim Day dawns—the tremulous feet
Of sad ghosts fade upon the brightening hills.
Farewell ! and when thou prayest, pray for me !
Pray for the outcast Spirit ! Pray for all
Strong Spirits that are outcast !

[Spirit vanishes. The day breaks.]

ORM.

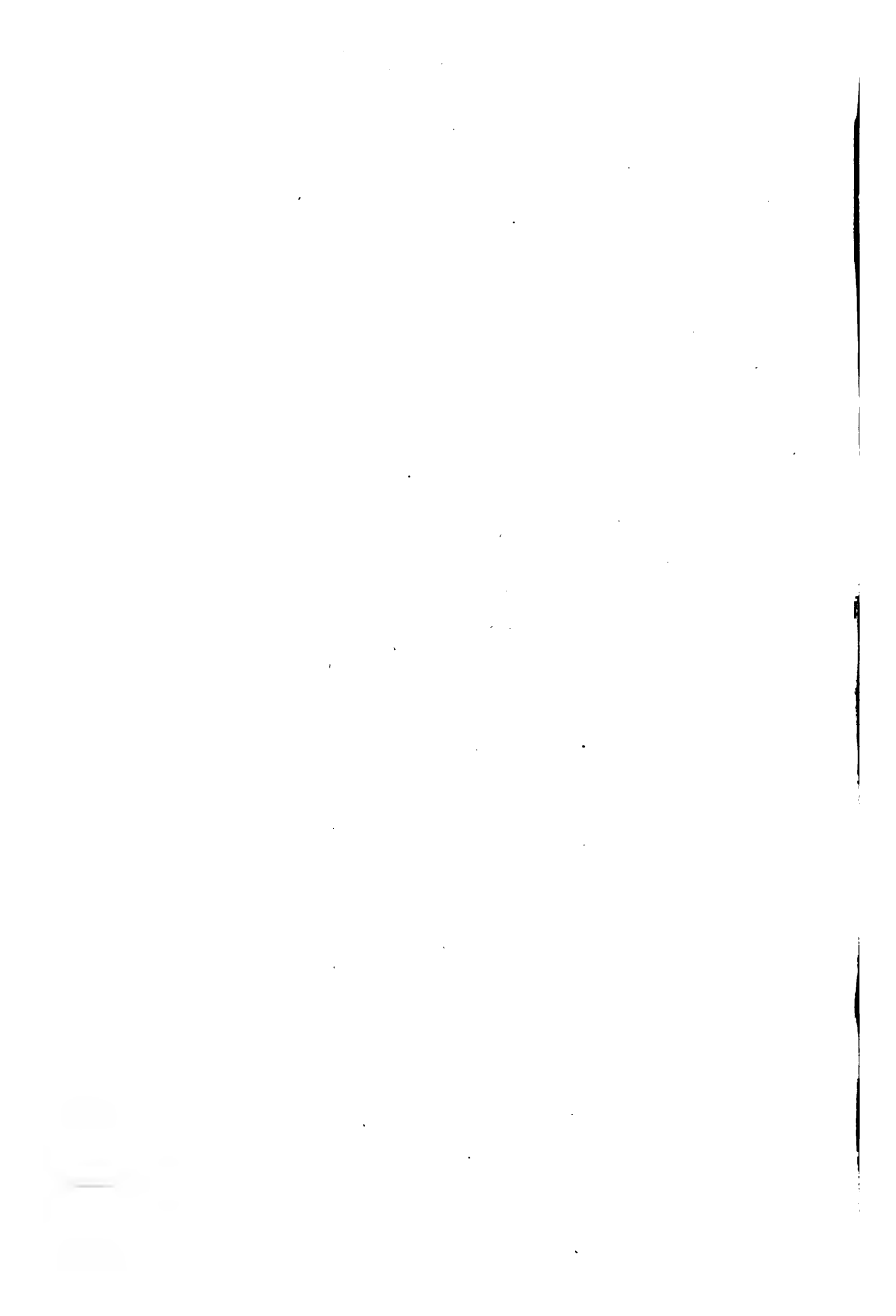
Father ! God !

Forgive thy child ! behold him on his knee !
Evil is evil, Father, Good is Good,
Darkness is dreadful, and the Light divine !

IX.

THE DEVIL'S MYSTICS.

*A Scroll Antique, all weed-behung,
Writ in a curious Southern tongue,
Wash'd to Orm's feet by the wild man,
After fierce nights of wind and rain ;
Many a midnight, wearily,
Over the parchment pondered he,
Now moved with sympathy intense,
Now vaguely grasping at the sense,
Till, in the end, he fashion'd it
Into the Songs that here are writ.*



IX.
THE DEVIL'S MYSTICS.

I.
THE INSCRIPTION WITHOUT.

THE Moral Law : all Evil is Defect ;
The limb deform'd for common use of life
Defect,—but haply in the line of growth.

II.

THE TREE OF LIFE.

The Master said :

“I have planted the Seed of a Tree,
It shall be strangely fed
With white dew and with red,
And the Gardeners shall be three—
Regret, Hope, Memory !”

The Master smiled :

For the Seed that He had set
Broke presently thro' the mould,
With a glimmer of green and gold,
And the Angels' eyes were wet—
Hope, Memory, Regret.

The Master cried :

“It liveth—breatheth—see !

Its soft lips open wide—

It looks from side to side—

How strange they gleam on me,

The little dim eyes of the Tree !”

The Master said :

“ After a million years,

The Seed I set and fed

To itself hath gatherēd

All the world's smiles and tears—

How mighty it appears !”

The Master said :

“ At last, at last, I see

A Blossom, a Blossom o' red

From the heart of the Tree is shed.

'Tis fairer certainly

Than the Tree, or the leaves o' the Tree ”

The Master cried :

“ O Angels, that guard the Tree,

A Blossom, a Blossom divine
Grows on this greenwood of mine :
What may this Blossom be ?
Name this Blossom to me !”

The Master smiled ;
For the Angels answered thus :
“Our tears have nourish’d the same,
We have given it a name
That seemeth fit to us—
We have called it *Spiritus*.”

The Master said :
“This Flower no Seed shall bear ;
But hither on a day
My beautiful Son shall stray,
And shall snatch it unawarc,
And wreath it in his hair.”

The Master smiled :
“The Tree shall never bear—

Seedless shall perish the Tree,
But the Flower my Son's shall be ;
He will pluck the Flower and wear,
Till it withers in his hair !”

III.

THE SEEDS.

When all that puzzles sense was planned,
When the first seeds of being fell,
In reverence bent, *I* stood at hand,
And heard a part of the spell :
“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !
Deepen into power and pain !”

Shoots of the seed, I saw them grow,
Green blades of vegetable sheen,
They darken'd as with wind, and so
The Earth's black ball grew green—
“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !
Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

Then starry-bright out of the ground
The firstling flowers sprang dewy-wet ;

I pluckt one, and it felt no wound—

There was no pain as yet.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

Next in His Hand He lifted thus

Bright water bubbling from the spring—

And in that crystal tremulous

Quicken'd a living thing.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

And suddenly ! ere I was aware,

(So fast the dreadful spell was tried),

O'er Earth's green bosom everywhere

Crawl'd living things, and cried.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

On every grass-blade glittering bright

A shining Insect leapt and played,

By every sea, on every height,
A Monster cast its shade—
“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !
Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

The most was lingering in the least,
The least became the most anon ;
From plant to fish, from fish to beast,
The Essence deepen'd on.
“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !
Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

And deeper still in subtle worth
The Essence grew, from gain to gain,
And subtler grew, with each new birth,
The creatures' powers of pain.
“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !
Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

Paler I saw the Master grow,
Faint and more faint His breathing fell,

And strangely, lower and more low,

He mutter'd over the spell :

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

Now the deep murmur of the Earth

Was mingled with a painful cry,

The yeanling young leapt up in mirth,

But the old lay down to die.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

When standing in the perfect light

I saw the first-born Mortal rise—

The flower of things he stood his height

With melancholy eyes.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

From all the rest he drew apart,

And stood erect on the green sod,

Holding his hand upon his heart,

And looking up at God !

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

He stood so terrible, so dread,

With right hand lifted pale and proud,

God feared the thing he fashionèd,

And fled into a cloud.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

And since that day He hid away

Man hath not seen the Face that fled,

And the wild question of that day

Hath not been answerèd.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

And since that day, with cloudy face,

Of His own handiwork afraid,

God from His heavenly hiding-place

Peers on the thing He made.

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

O Crown of things, O good and wise,

O mortal Soul that would'st be free,

I weep to look into thy eyes—

Thou art so like to *me* !

“Grow, Seed ! blossom, Brain !

Deepen, deepen, into pain !”

IV.

FIRE AND WATER ; OR, A VOICE OF THE FLESH.

“Two white arms, a moss pillow,
A curtain o’ green ;
Come love me, love me,
Come clasp me unseen !”

As red as a rose is,
I saw her arise,
Fresh waked from reposes,
With wild dreamy eyes.

I sprang to her, clasp’d her,
I trembled, I prest,
I drank her warm kisses,
I kiss’d her white breast.

With a ripple of laughter,
A dazzle of spray,
She melted, she melted,
And glimmer'd away!

Down my breast runs the water,
In my heart burns the fire,
My face is like crimson
With shame and desire !

V.

SANITAS.

Dreamily, on her milk-white Ass,
Rideth the maiden Sanitas—
With zone of gold her waist is bound,
Her brows are with immortelles crown'd ;
Dews are falling, song-birds sing,
It is a Christian evening—
Lower, lower, sinks the sun,
The white stars glimmer, one by one !

Who sitteth musing at his door?
Silas, the Leper, gaunt and hoar ;
Tho' he is curst in every limb,
Full whitely Time hath snowed on him—
Dews are falling, song-birds sing,
It is a Christian evening—

The Leper, drinking in the air,
Sits like a beast, with idiot stare.

How pale ! how wondrous ! she doth pass,
The heavenly maiden Sanitas ;
She looketh, and she shuddereth,
She passeth on with bated breath—
Dews are falling, song-birds sing,
It is a Christian evening—
His mind is like a stagnant pool,
She passeth o'er it, beautiful !

Brighter, whiter, in the skies,
Open innumerable eyes ;
The Leper looketh up and sees,
His aching heart is soothed by these—
Dews are falling, song-birds sing,
It is a Christian evening—
He looketh up with heart astir,
And every Star hath eyes like her !

Onward on her milk-white Ass
Rideth the maiden Sanitas.
The boughs are green, the grain is pearl'd,
But 'tis a miserable world—
Dews are falling, song-birds sing,
It is a Christian evening—
All o'er the blue above her, she
Beholds bright spots of Leprosy!

VI.

THE PHILOSOPHERS.

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

Lo ! we sit apart,

Each right hand is uplifted,

Each left hand holds a heart ;

At our feet rolls by the tumult,

O'er our heads the still stars gleam—

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

We drink and dream !

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

We are worn and old,

Each hath the sad forehead,

Each the cup of gold.

In our eyes the awe-struck Nations

Look, and name us wise, and go—

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

We drink and know !

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

Silent, kingly, pure ;

Who is wise if we be foolish ?

Who, if we die, shall endure ?

The Bacchanals with dripping vine-leaves,

Blushing meet our eyes, and haste—

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

Bitter to taste !

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

Spirits pure as snow ;

White star-frost is on our foreheads—

We are weary, we would go.

Hark ! the world fades with its voices,

Fades the tumult and the cry—

We are the Drinkers of Hemlock !

We drink and die !

VII.

PRAYER FROM THE DEEPS.

Father which art in heaven,—not here below ;

Be Thy name hallowèd, in that place of worth ;

And till Thy Kingdom cometh, and we know,

Be Thy will done more tenderly on Earth ;

Since we must live,—give us this day our bread ;

Forgive our stumblings,—since Thou mad'st
blind ;

If we offend Thee, Sire, at least forgive

As tenderly as we forgive our kind ;—

Spare us temptation,—human or divine ;

Deliver us from evil, now and then ;

The Kingdom, Power, and Glory all are Thine

For ever and for evermore. Amen.

VIII.

HOMUNCULUS ; OR, THE SONG OF DEICIDES.

I.

Now all the mystic Lamps that shed
Light on the living world are fled ;
Now the swart digger rinses gold,
Unless a starless heaven and cold ;
Now every God, save one, is dead,
Now that last God is almost sped ;
Cold falls the dew, chill rise the tides,
To this still Song of Deicides.

2.

Homunculus ! Homunculus !
Not ever shalt thou conquer us !
Zeus, Astaroth, Brahm, and Menù,
With all the gods, white, black, and blue,

Are fallen, and while I murmur thus,
Strong, and more strong, Homunculus
Upon a Teuton Jackass rides,
Singing the Song of Deicides.

3.

It seems but yesterday the dim
And solitary germ of him
Glimmer'd most strangely on my sense,
While, with my microscope intense,
I search'd a Beast's brain-cavern dark :—
A germ—a gleam—a cell—a spark—
Grown to Homunculus, who rides
To my sad Song of Deicides.

4.

O had I then so far foreseen,
This day of doom had never been,
For with a drop of fire from Hell
I would have killed the feeble Cell.

Too late ! too late ! for slow and strange
He has passed the darker spheres of change,
Lo ! he emerges—shouts—derides,
Singing the Song of Deicides !

5.

Black is his raiment, top to toe,
His flesh is white and warm below,
All thro' his silent veins flow free
Hunger, and Thirst, and Venery ;
But in his eye a still small flame,
Like the first Cell from which he came,
Burns round and luminous,—as he rides
To my still Song of Deicides !

6.

With Obic Circle he began,
Swift thro' the Phallic rites he ran,
He watch'd until his head went round
The Memphian Sphinx's stare profound ;

All these by turn he overcast,
And suck'd the Orphic Egg at last ;
Now laughing low he westward strides,
Singing the Song of Deicides !

7.

He drives the Gods o' the North to death—
The Sanctus Spiritus is breath—
He plucks down Thammuz from his joy,
And kneads him to a huswife's toy ;
He stares to shame the Afric spheres ;
He strikes—he overturns—he sneers—
Over the fallen Titans strides,
And squeaks the Song of Deicides !

8.

Homunculus ! Homunculus !
Wretched, degenerate, impious !
He will not stay, he will not speak—
Another blow ! another shriek !

Lo! where he hacketh suddenly
At the red Cross of Calvary!
All darkens—faintly moan the tides—
Sing low the Song of Deicides!

9.

Gigantic, in a dark mist, see!
Loometh the Cross of Calvary;
With rayless eyes the Skeleton
Quivers through all its bones thereon.
Deep grows the mist, faint falls the wind,
The bloodshot sun setteth behind—
A crash! a fall!—The Cross he strides,
Singing the Song of Deicides!

10.

Now he hath conquered godhead thus,
Whither will turn Homunculus?
I am the only God let be—
All but the fiends believe in me;

(Tho' all the Angels deem me prince,
My kith and kin I can't convince.)
Christ help me now ! Hither he rides,
Singing my Song of Deicides !

II.

Silent I wait—(how stand the odds ?)
I am the Serpent of the Gods,—
Wait !—draw the forked tongue in slow,
Hoard up my venom for the blow,
Crouch in my cave—of all the host
I know he feareth me the most—
Then strike and crush that thing accurst
I should have stifled at the first ! . . .
All Earth awaits ! Hither he rides !
Cold fall the dews, chill rise the tides,
To this still Song of Deicides !

IX.

ROSES.

"Sad, and sweet, and wise,
Here a child reposes,
Dust is on his eyes,
Quietly he lies,—
Satan, strew Roses !"

Weeping low, creeping slow,
Came the Weary-winged ;
Roses red over the dead
Quietly he fling'd.

"I am old," he thought,
"And the world's day closes ;
Pale and fever-fraught,
Sadly have I brought
These blood-red Roses."

By his side the mother came
Shudderingly creeping ;
The Devil's and the woman's heart
Bitterly were weeping.

" Swift he came and swift he flew,
Hopeless he reposes ;
Waiting on is weary too,—
Wherefore on his grave we strew
Bitter, withering Roses."

The Devil gripped the woman's heart,
With gall he staunch'd its bleeding ;
Far away, beyond the day,
The Lord heard interceding.

" Lord God, One in Three !
Sure Thy anger closes ;
Yesterday I died, and see
The Weary-winged over me
Bitterly streweth Roses."

The voice cried out, "Rejoice ! rejoice !

There shall be sleep for evil !"

And all the sweetness of God's voice

Passed strangely through the Devil.

X.

HERMAPHRODITUS.

This is a section of a Singer's Brain—
How delicately run the granular lines !
By what strange chemic could I touch this thing,
That it again might quicken and dissolve,
Changing and blooming, into glittering gleams
Of fancy ; or what chemic could so quicken
The soft soil backward that it might put forth
Green vegetable shoots,—as long ago ?
O on what headland did it blow of old
And ripen hitherward ! Surely 'twas a place
Flowery and starry !

Cast it back to the grave !
Look down no more, but raise thine eyes and see
Who standeth glorious in the brightening Dawn !

Behold him, on the apex of the cone,
The perfect blossom of miraculous life,
Hermaphroditus. With how subtle shade
Male into female beauty mingleth—thews
Of iron coated o'er with skin of silk ;—
There, on the crown he stands, the perfect one,
Witching the world with sterile loveliness,—
Beyond him, darkness and the unknown change,
The next uncurtain'd and still higher scene
That is to follow. Are those pinions,—peeping
Under the delicate-flesh'd white shoulder-blades?

XI.

AFTER.

I see, as plain as eyes can see,
From this dark point of mystery,
Death sitting at his narrow Gate,—
While all around, disconsolate,
The wretched weep, the weary wait.

God pity us who weep and wait !

But, better still, if sadder, I
From this dark corner can descry
What is well-veil'd from human view :
Beyond the Gate I can pursue
The flight of those who have passed thro'.

God pity us who have passed thro' !

In at the portal, one by one,
They creep, they crawl, with shivering moan—

Nobles and beggars, priests and kings ;
Out at the thither gate each springs
A Spirit,—with a pair of wings !

God pity us now we have wings.

All round the starry systems stir,
Each silent as a death-chamber ;
There is no sound of melody,
Only deep space and mystery ;
And each hath wings to wander free.

God pity us who wander free !

Some cannot use their wings at all ;
Some try a feeble flight and fall ;
A few, like larks in earthly skies,
With measured beat of wings uprise,
And make their way to Paradise.

God help us on to Paradise !

If ever in their flight thro' space
They chance to reach that resting-place,

I do not think these creatures dim
Will find the Lord of Cherubim
Exactly what they picture Him.

May God be what we picture Him !

Out of the fiery Sun is thrown
To other worlds the meteor-stone ;
Back to the Sun, in season right,
The meteor-stone doth take its flight.
Lost in that melancholy light.

We fade in melancholy light.

I see, as plain as eyes can see,
From this dark point of mystery,
Those fledgling Spirits everywhere ;
They sing, they lessen up the air ;
They go to God—Christ help them there !

We go to God—Christ help us there.

XII.

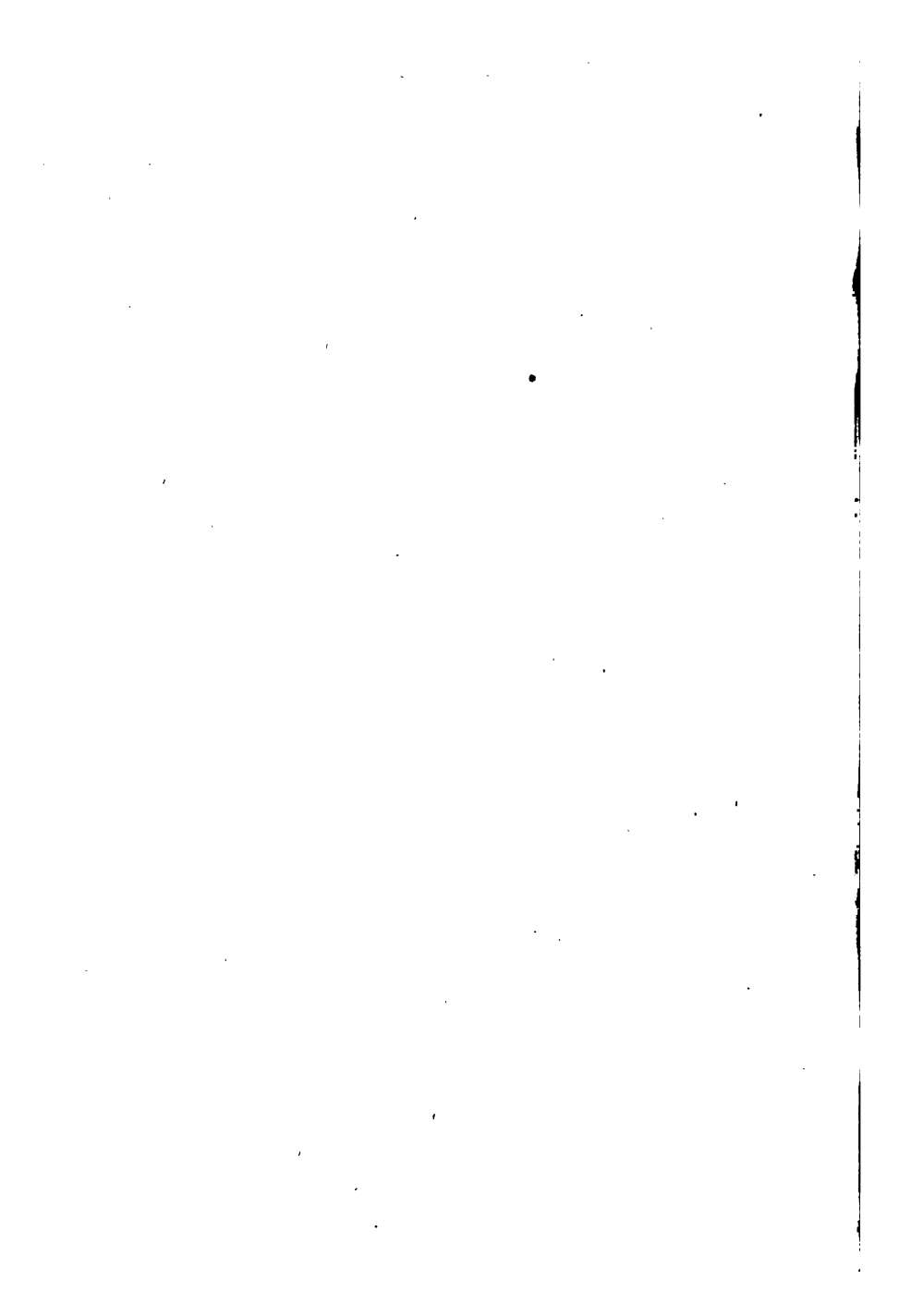
HIS PRAYER.

In the time of transfiguration,
Melt me, Master, like snow ;
Melt me, dissolve me, inhale me
Into Thy wool-white cloud ;
With a warm wind blow me upward
Over the hills and the seas,
And upon a summer morning
Poise me over the valley
Of Thy mellow, mellow realm ;
Then, for a wondrous moment,
Watch me from infinite space
With Thy round red Eyeball of sunlight,
And melt and dissolve me downward
In the beautiful silver Rain
That drippeth musically,
With a gleam like Starlight and Moonlight,
On the footstool of Thy Throne.

X.

THE VISION OF THE MAN ACCURST.

*How in the end the Judgment dread
Shall by the Lord be utter'd,—
While brightly in a City of Rest
Shall flash the fountains of the Blest,
And gladdening around the Throne
All mortal men shall smile,—save one. . . .
Children of Earth, hear last rehearst
The Vision of the Man Accurst.*



X.

THE VISION OF THE MAN ACCURST.

JUDGMENT was over ; all the world redeem'd
Save one Man,—who had sinned all sins, whose soul
Was blackness and foul odour. Last of all,
When all was lamb-white, thro' the summer Sea
Of ministering Spirits he was drifted
On to the white sands ; there he lay and writhed,
Worm-like, black, venomous, with eyes accurst
Looking defiance, dazzled by the light
That gleam'd upon his clench'd and blood-stain'd
hands ;
While, with a voice low as a funeral bell,
The Seraph, sickening, read the sable scroll,
And as he read the Spirits ministrant
Darken'd and murmur'd, " Cast him forth, O Lord ! "

And, from the Shrine where unbeheld He broods,
Thé Lord said, “ ’Tis the basest mortal born—
Cast him beyond the Gate !”

The wild thing laugh'd

Defiant, as from wave to wave of light
He drifted, till he swept beyond the Gate,
Past the pale Seraph with the silvern eyes ;
And there the wild Wind, that for ever beats
About the edge of brightness, caught him up,
And like a straw whirl'd round and lifted him,
And on a dark shore in the Underworld
Cast him, alone and shivering ; for the Clime
Was sunless, and the ice was like a sheet
Of glistening tin, and the faint glimmering peaks
Were twisted to fantastic forms of frost,
And everywhere the frozen moonlight steam'd
Foggy and blue, save where the abysses loom'd
Sepulchral shadow. But the Man arose,

With teeth gnashed beast-like, waved wild feeble hands
At the white Gate (that glimmer'd far away,
Like to the round ball of the Sun beheld
Through interstices in a wood of pine),
Cast a shrill curse at the pale Judge within
Then groaning, beast-like crouch'd.

Like golden waves
That break on a green island of the south,
Amid the flash of many plumaged wings,
Passed the fair days in Heaven. By the side
Of quiet waters perfect Spirits walked,
Low singing, in the star-dew, full of joy
In their own thoughts and pictures of those thoughts
In looking eyes that loved them ; while beside them,
After exceeding storm, the Waters of Life
With soft sea-sound subsided. Then God said,
" 'Tis finished—all is well ! " But as He spake
A voice, from out the lonely Deep beneath,
Mock'd !

Then to the Seraph at the Gate,
Who looketh on the Deep with steadfast eyes
For ever, God cried, "What is he that mocks?"
The Seraph answered, "'Tis the Man accurst!"
And, with a voice of most exceeding peace,
God ask'd, "What doth the Man?"

The Seraph said :

"Upon a desolate peak, with hoar-frost hung,
Amid the steaming vapours of the Moon,
He sitteth on a throne, and hideously
Playeth at judgment ; at his feet, with eyes
Slimy and luminous, squats a monstrous Toad ;
Above his head pale phantoms of the Stars
Fulfil cold ministrations of the void,
And in their dim and melancholy lustre
His shadow, and the shadow of the Toad
Beneath him, linger. Sceptred, thron'd, and crown'd,
The foul judgeth the foul, and sitting grim,
Laughs !"

With a voice of most exceeding peace
The Lord said, "Look no more!"

The Waters of Life
Broke with a gentle sea-sound gladdening—
God turn'd and blest them; as He blest the same,
A voice, from out the lonely void beneath,
Shriek'd!

Then to the Seraph at the Gate,
Who looketh on the Deep with steadfast eyes
For ever, God cried, "What is he that shrieks?"
The Seraph answered, "'Tis the Man accurst!"
And, with a voice of most exceeding peace,
God ask'd, "What doth the Man?"

The Seraph said:
"Around him the wild phantoms of the fog
Moan in the rheumy hoar-frost and cold steam.
Long time, crown'd, sceptred, on his throne he sits

Playing at judgment ; then with shrill voice cries—
“’Tis finished, thou art judged !” and laughing fierce
He thrusteth down an iron heel to crush
The foul Toad, that with dim and luminous eyes
So stareth at his soul. Thrice doth he lift
His foot up fiercely—lo ! he shrinks and cowers—
Then, with a wild glare at the far-off Gate,
Rushes away, and, rushing thro’ the dark,
Shrieks !”

With a voice of most exceeding peace
The Lord said, “ Look no more !”

The Waters of Life,
The living spiritual Waters, broke,
Fountain-like, up against the Master’s Breast,
Giving and taking blessing. Overhead
Gather’d the shining legions of the Stars,
Led by the ethereal Moon, with dewy eyes
Of lustre : these have been baptized in fire,

Their raiment is of molten diamond,
And 'tis their office, as they circling move
In their blue orbits, evermore to turn
Their faces heavenward, drinking peace and strength
From that great Flame which, in the core of Heaven,
Like to the white heart of a violet burns,
Diffusing rays and odour. Blessing all,
God sought their beauteous orbits, and behold !
The Eyes innumerably glistening
Were turn'd away from Heaven, and with sick stare,
Like the blue gleam of salt dissolved in fire,
They searched the Void, as human faces look
On horror.

To the Seraph at the Gate,
Who looketh on the Deep with steadfast eyes,
God cried, "What is this thing whereon they gaze?"
The Seraph answered, "On the Man accurst."
And, with a voice of most exceeding peace,
God ask'd, "What doth the Man?"

The Seraph said :

“O Master ! send Thou forth a tongue of fire
To wither up this worm ! Serene and cold,
Flooded with moon-dew, lies the World, and there
The Man roams ; and the image of the Man
In the wan waters of the frosty sphere
Falleth gigantic. Up and down he drifts,
Worm-like, black, venomous, with eyes accursed,
Waving his bloody hands in fierce appeal,
So that the gracious faces of Thy Stars
Are troubled, and the stainless tides of light
Shadow pollution. With wild, ape-like eyes,
The wild thing whining peers thro' horrent air,
And rusheth up and down, seeking to find
A face to look upon, a hand to touch,
A heart that beats ; but all the World is void
And beauteous. All alone in the Cold Clime,
Alone within the lonely universe,
Crawleth the Man accurst ! ”

Then said the Lord,
 "Doth he repent?" And the fair Seraph said,
 "Nay—he blasphemeth! Send Thou forth thy fire!"
 But with a voice of most exceeding peace,
 Out of the Shrine where unbeheld He broods,
 God said, "What I have made, a living Soul,
 Cannot be unmade, but endures for ever."
 Then added, "Call the Man!"

The Seraph heard,
 And in a low voice named the lost one's name;
 The wild Wind that for ever beats the Gate
 Caught up the word, and fled thro' the cold void.
 'Twas murmur'd on, as a lorn echo fading,
 From peak to peak. Swift as a wolf the Man
 Was rushing o'er a waste, with shadow streaming
 Backward against a frosty gleaming wind,
 When like a fearful whisper in his ear
 'Twas wafted; then his blanch'd lips shook like leaves
 In that chill wind, his hair was lifted up,

He paused, his shadow paused, like stone and shadow,
And shivering, glaring round him, the Man moaned,
“ Who calls ? ” and in a moment he was 'ware
Of the white light streaming from the far Gate,
And looming, blotted black against the light,
The Seraph, with uplifted forefinger,
Naming his name !

And ere the Man could fly,
The wild Wind in its circuit swept upon him
And like a straw whirled him and lifted him,
And cast him at the Gate,—a bloody thing—
Wild, moaning, horrible, obscene, unclean ;
A body swollen and stained, like the wool
Of sheep that in the rainy season crawl
About the hills, and sleep on foul damp beds
Of bracken rusting red. There, breathing hard,
Glaring with fiery eyes, panted the Man,
With scorch'd lips drooping, thirsting as he heard
The flowing of the Fountains far within.

Then said the Lord, "Is the Man there?" and "Yea,"
 Answered the Seraph pale. Then said the Lord,
 "What doth the Man?" The Seraph, frowning, said :
 "O Master, in the belly of him is fire,
 He thirsteth, fiercely thrusting out his hands,
 And threateneth, seeking water!" Then the Lord
 Said, "Give him water—let him drink!"

The Seraph,

Stooping above him, with forefinger bright
 Touch'd the gold kerbstone of the Gate, and lo !
 Water gush'd forth and gleamed ; and lying prone
 The Man crawl'd thither, dipt his fever'd face,
 Drank long and deeply ; then, his thirst appeased,
 Thrust in his bloody hands unto the wrist,
 And let the gleaming Fountain play upon them,
 And looking up out of his dripping hair,
 Grinned mockery at the giver.

Then the Lord

Said low, "How doth the Man?" The Seraph said :

"It is a snake ! He mocketh all Thy gifts,
And, in a snake's voice half-articulate,
Blasphemeth !" Then the Lord : "Doth the Man crave
To enter in ?" "Not so," the Seraph said,
"He saith——" "What saith he?" "That his Soul
is filled

With hate of Thee and of Thy ways ; he loathes
Pure pathways where the fruitage of the Stars
Hangeth resplendent, and he spitteth hate
On all Thy Children. Send Thou forth Thy fire !
In no wise is he better than the beasts,
The gentle beasts, that come like morning dew
And vanish. Let him die !" Then said the Lord :
"What I have made endures ; but 'tis not meet
This thing should cross my perfect work for ever.
Let him begone !" Then cried the Seraph pale :
"O Master ! at the frozen Clime he glares
In awe, shrieking on Thee !" "What doth he crave ?"
"Neither Thy Heaven nor Thy holy ways.
He murmureth out he is content to dwell

In the Cold Climie for ever, so Thou sendest
A face to look upon, a heart that beats,
A hand to touch—albeit like himself,
Black, venomous, unblest, exiled, and base :
Give him this thing, he will be very still,
Nor trouble Thee again.”

— The Lord mused.

Still,

Scarce audible, trembled the Waters of Life—
Over all Heaven the Snow of the same Thought
Which rose within the Spirit of the Lord
Fell hushedly ; the innumerable Eyes
Swam in a lustrous dream.

Then said the Lord :

“ In all the waste of worlds there dwelleth not
Another like himself—behold he is
The basest Mortal born. Yet 'tis not meet
His cruel cry, for ever piteous,

Hushedly, hushedly, hushedly,
In heaven fell the Snow of Thought Divine,
Gleaming upon the Waters of Life beneath,
And melting,—as with slow and lingering pace,
The Shapes stole forth into the windy cold,
And saw the thing that lay and throbbed and lived,
And stooped above him: Then one reach'd a hand
And touch'd him, and the fierce thing shrank and
moaned,
Hiding his face.

“Have they beheld the Man?”
The Lord said; and the Seraph answer'd, “Yea;”
And the Lord said again, “What doth the Man?”

“He lieth like a log in the wild blast,
And as he lieth, lo! one sitting takes
His head into her lap, and moans his name,
And smoothes his matted hair from off his brow,
And croons in a low voice a cradle song;

And lo ! the other kneeleth at his side,
Half-shrinking in the old habit of her fear,
Yet hungering with her eyes, and passionately
Kissing his bloody hands."

Then said the Lord,
"Will they go forth with him ?" A voice replied,
"He grew within my womb—my milk was white
Upon his lips. I will go forth with him !"
And a voice cried, "I will go forth with him ;
I have kist his lips, I have lain upon his breast,
I bare him children, and I closed his eyes ;
I will go forth with him !"

Still hushedly
Snow'd down the Thought Divine, the Waters of Life
Flow'd softly, sadly ; for an alien sound,
A piteous human cry, a sob forlorn
Thrill'd to the heart of Heaven.

The Man wept.

And in a voice of most exceeding peace
The Lord said (while against the Breast Divine
The Waters of Life leapt, gleaming, gladdening) :
“The Man is saved ; let the Man enter in.”

THE END.

November, 1881.



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